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modERn music on cuE

the new voices of modERn music

plumb →

switchfoot

the insyderz

reality check

say so

silage

smalltown poets



05
may/june 1997

issue number 12

<http://www.7ball.com>

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available now from gumshoe records.



Finally, in honor of Mother's Day, we offer this bit of poetry, dedicated to the moms of all 7ball readers:

You gave me life.
when I did not exist.
I was naked
and you clothed me.
With a song
you calmed the tears.
With a touch
You eased my pain.
You directed my steps
with firm guidance.
Often I was lost,
and you always found me.
You showed me integrity
with unspoken words.
Through your perseverance
I developed character.
When I was sick
You nurtured me.
In my weakness
You provided strength.
Even when I was separated from you,
You never divorced me.
You brought me joy
when I was sad.
In my ignorance
You revealed your principles.
You taught me to give
Even as you did without.
When I was selfish
You loved me unconditionally.
You shaped my past and charted my future
You are my Mother.
—Frank Chimento
(Blimpie's, Nashville—May 1997)

To our moms:

Your love, grace and mercy has
allowed us to comprehend and fully appreciate
the greatness of God, our Father.

Happy Mother's Day from your kids at 7ball!

HAIKU FEVER:
Fewer grams of fat
than the average burger
Oh yeah, music too
David Wright
Lincoln, NE



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may/june 1997
number 12

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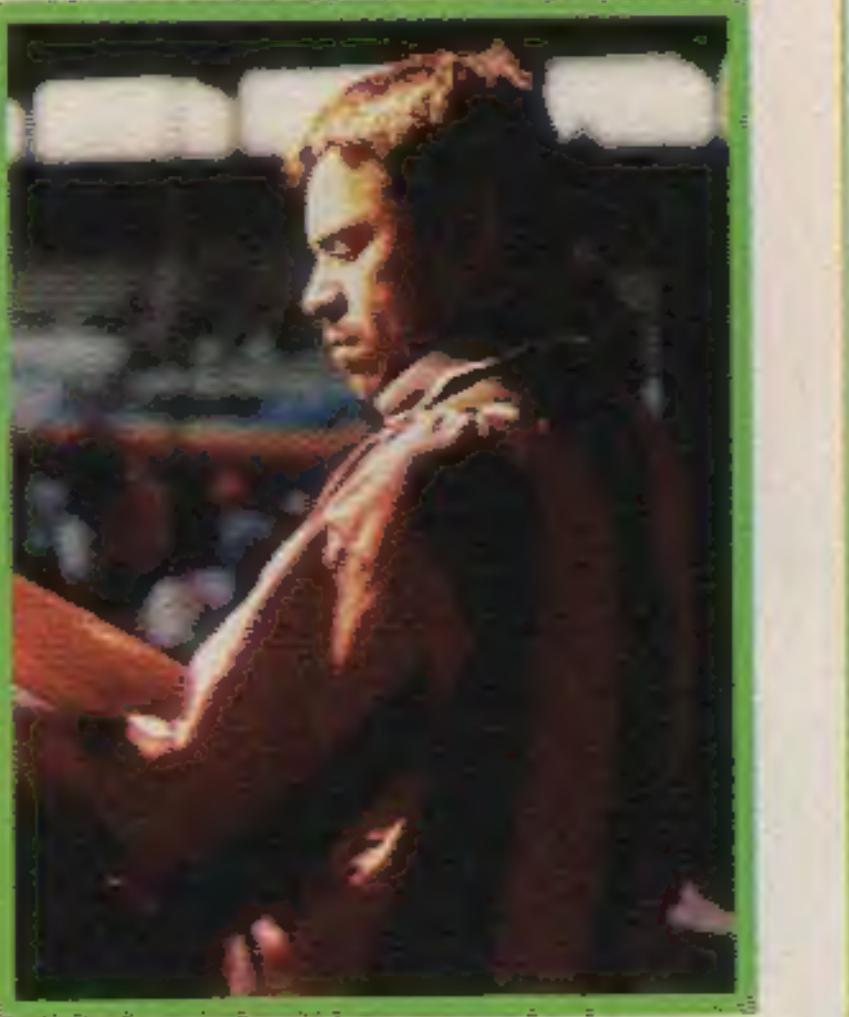
Sever News

ALL ROADS LEAD TO SIXPENCE

Although they haven't released an album in years, Sixpence None the Richer is still making new music. Recent concerts have included many new songs, including one Matt Slocum wrote after seeing the film *Il Postino* (*The Postman*). The song, with its brave firm signature and Spanish flavor, is based on a poem by 1971 Nobel Prize in literature winner Pablo Neruda.

Former Sixpence guitarist Tess Wiley is still pursuing a mainstream solo deal. In the meantime, fans of her Phantasmic work on Flying Tart should look for a new record this summer, chock full o' cover tunes. The song list promises to be quite eclectic, ranging from Debbie Boone's "You Light Up My Life" to songs from Erasure, Janet Jackson, Level 42 and Leslie Phillips. All of the songs are being rebuilt into that wildcat rock 'n' roll Tess Wiley style we all know and love.

Meanwhile, bass player **J.J. Plasencio** has recently left Sixpence None the Richer to spread his creative wings (they're all still friends). He has joined with new band Plumb (see cover story, New Voices), and his plans also include some instrumental projects (including something with Poor Old Lu's Jesse Sprinkle).



Love Coma, which shares the same Texas roots as Sixpence (Matt Slocum used to be the guitarist in Love Coma) is this close to signing a new record deal. Although the paperwork is being circulated, we don't want to jinx them by saying any names (let's just say that gold and frankincense would be appropriate gifts right now). At a recent showcase, they unveiled some fine new songs.

Producer Armand John Petri (who's worked with—you guessed it—Sixpence None the Richer, as well as Goo Goo Dolls, among others) tells us Swedish band The Miscellaneous was here in the States last month peddling their fabulous record *All Good Weeds Grow Up*. The Miscellaneous played several dates, including Nashville, Chicago and a few in Ohio (while the rest of the band is Swedish, lead singer Stef Loy, who also writes many of the songs, is an American who lives in Ohio). Although *All Good Weeds Grow Up* currently has no distribution in the U.S., it has been doing very well in Europe. Check out their web site at [http://www.algonet.se/~agw/the_miscellaneous/]. Somebody sign this band!

Sarah Masen, who (in addition to being an object of our great affection and admiration) had members of Sixpence None the Richer over to her house to watch the Grammys, continues preparing her second major label record (third, if you count her delightful indie project). While we wait, an EP has been sent to radio stations near you; the 4-song collection includes a remix of "Break Hard the Wishbone" and a live



Bruce Brown with The Waiting at Stone Mountain, Georgia.
<http://www.7ball.com>

HEY YOU FLIP THROUGH THE MAG AND WATCH THE BOX BELOW.

acoustic rendering of Elvis Costello's "Veronica." That next record, by the way, is scheduled for late summer or early fall, and promises to have a more varied feel to it, as she's been listening to a lot of r&b of late.

Some bands that have toured with Sixpence appear on Sara Bellum's *Take Time To Listen, Vol. 3*. Proceeds from the record will go toward the label's "Music For Meals" project (which will feed kids at the 5 Minute Walk House in Mexico—and to Compassion International). The sampler includes live cuts from Dime Store Prophets, Dryve, Five Iron Frenzy, Model Engine (formerly Black Eyed Sceva); and new songs from The Electrics (Irish Celtic pop) and Sherri Jongeward. The new Dime Store Prophets album *Fantastic Distraction* should be in stores very soon after you read this (like this afternoon). The four tracks from the record were produced by John Keane, who has worked with R.E.M., Cowboy Junkies, and 10,000 Maniacs; band member Masaki produced the rest of the project.

THE KIDS DIG 'EM

Hokus Pick is set to return in force—after their last record label disintegrated out from under them, they continued their "tour that never ends" and released an indie CD in their native Canada. Well, the indie CD is being released in the States this summer on Freedom, with a brand-new record to follow soon.

Everybodyduck will be the "artists in residence" at Hume Lake Christian Camp in Hume Lake, California during a 13-week period this summer. More than 1400 people arrive at the camp each week, giving the band an opportunity to reach more than 18,000 people during their stay. "It isn't a 'hit-and-run' ministry like touring becomes after a while," says guitarist Tim Slovenic. "We feel strongly that we are called to build relationships with our audience. Spending a week with the same people allows us to paint a better picture of Christ through our songs and even through our actions outside of our performances." Look for the band's next project in August.

Pat Boone's *GospelAmerica* has been pulled from TBN (Trinity Broadcasting Network) due to the controversial nature of his *In A Metal Mood: No More Mr. Nice Guy* album, which features big band remakes of songs by the likes of Metallica and Alice Cooper. "I thought everybody saw it for what it was, sort of a parody," Boone says. "Of course, it was difficult for Christian people, who have followed me for years and years. It seemed like I had burst out in some demented way."

MOST PEOPLE DON'T REALIZE THIS, BUT ACTUALLY I'M QUITE FAMOUS
More of our favorite bands are making inroads with mainstream media: The MxPx video "Chick Magnet" has aired on MTV's *120 Minutes*, and on MTV2; the band continues to climb the radio charts of the *CMT*. Six Feet



Deep debuted as the #1 Most Added Record on *CMT*'s Loud chart (actual position #69), and as #3 most added on *Gavin*, *FMQB*, and *Net*. At the Grammys, dc Talk walked away with the "Best Rock Gospel Album" award. The Eric Clapton/Babyface collaboration "Change Your World"—cowritten by Christian music's Gordon Kennedy (Dogs Of Peace), Wayne Kirkpatrick, and Tommy Sims—was awarded both "Song Of The Year" and "Record Of The Year." Third Day's "Nothing At All" has been re-released to mainstream radio, and is getting airplay on 36 mainstream rock stations and has moved into the top 40 on R&B's Mainstream and Active Rock charts. The band's next project will be released in late summer, and is being produced by Sam Taylor (King's X, Galactic Cowboys). Jars of Clay was named "Group Of The Year" at this year's Nashville Music Awards, presented February 12. Jesus Freak from dc Talk received honors as "Best Contemporary Christian Album." Christafari's *Valley Of Decision* was nominated for "Album Of The Year" at the 9th Annual Tamika Reggae Awards, March 16 in New York City. *Valley Of Decision* remained in the top 15 of *Billboard*'s Reggae Album Sales chart for 32 weeks of 1996. Visit the Tamika Awards web site at www.coolcrew.com/colsite/Tamika.

WE'VE GOT A NEW RECORD

Oneman is a project coming soon from Dez Dickerson, president of Absolute Records. Dickerson was formerly guitarist for The Artist (formerly known as The Artist Formerly Known as Prince, formerly known as Prince, formerly).

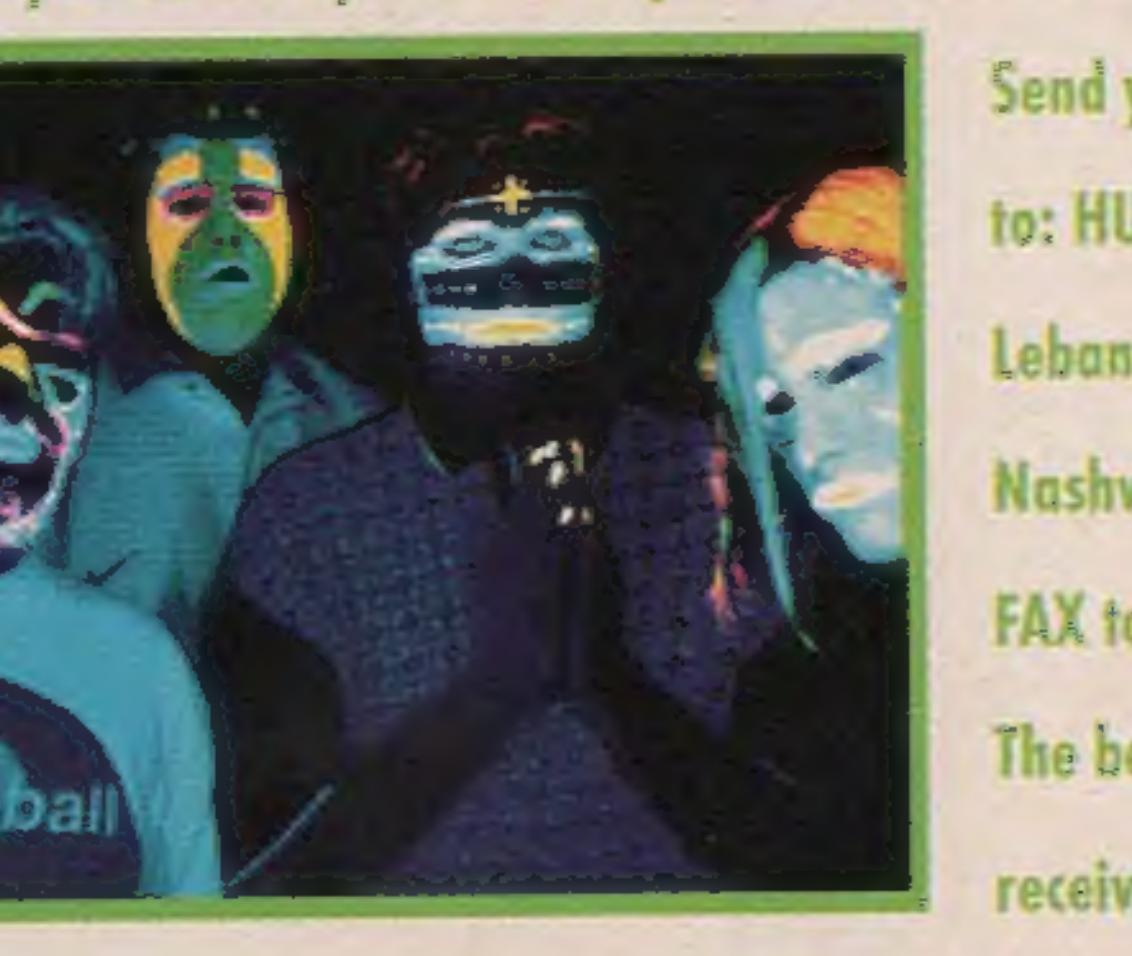
Miss Angie is a new rock band, fronted by lead singer Angie Turner. Her *Myrrh* debut, *Trampoline*, will hit stores this June, produced by Shawn Turner, Dan Fritz, Orin Thornton (all Johnny Q. Public), and David Zaffiro (Whitecross, Brett Williams).

AND IN THE BUSINESS SECTION

Nashville's Gaylord Entertainment has announced the \$1.55 billion sale of cable channels TNN (The Nashville Network) and CMT (Country Music Television) to Westinghouse Electric/CBS. Gaylord plans to sink its resources into its Christian holdings, by upgrading and refocusing *Z Music Television*, and by continuing as owner of Word Records, which it purchased in January.

"Gospel Music," a term representing all forms of Christian music, has increased its market share to 4.3 percent, according to a report by the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA). The report shows Gospel music as the sixth most popular genre (behind rock, country, urban contemporary, pop, and rap; ahead of classical, jazz, oldies, new age) with total sales of \$538 million during 1996. This is a thirty percent increase from 1995, which showed total sales of \$381 million.

"Can you come up with a caption for this Rocketboy photo?"



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Until the return of Christ we will continue to debate the co-mingling of business and ministry. Can they coexist? Should they coexist? I've observed and participated in this uneasy union for three years, since moving to Nashville—Christian Music City, USA. As time goes by, these conversations are getting more and more heated, which says more about the state of our industry than all the charts, statistics, and critics combined. SoundScan can finally measure our achievements but there is no scale on which to weigh our satisfaction with the work we are doing.

I've heard many who support the philosophy that Christian music is only a "business." Just as many say it is strictly a "ministry." The tension between these two philosophical points is creating frustration within the Christian music community. The solution to our chaos will be determined by those with the ability to combine Christian business principles with their passion for reaching the lost. Our future lies somewhere between these two extremes. Balance is the key, and the locksmiths are on the way.

Before moving to Nashville, a friend who was formerly in the Christian music industry encouraged me to stay grounded and focused on Christ. He told me I would encounter many things, people, and organizations which could leave me disillusioned. Until recently, I would have echoed those sentiments. At times this industry seemed very dark on the inside. In hindsight, perhaps some of the darkness was merely a reflection of my own spiritual emptiness for not always following my friend's advice.

Fortunately, our industry has experienced a great deal of internal change in the past two years and, in the process, the Son is shining brighter. There is a spirit of true repentance falling on our industry and people's lives are changing. We don't want our ways to cause the non-Christians to blaspheme Christ (Romans 2:24). We strive to be conscious of our calling and competent in our ability.

Brandon Ebel (Tooth and Nail, BEC): "I think the mainstream markets and the Christian markets are going to become much closer. We're going to see

New leaders with new passions are rising up while the stagnant disappear. We're witnessing a "changing of the guard." Newcomers with business savvy and a calling to ministry are taking on the responsibility with a renewed sense of purpose, passion, and integrity.

Along with the internal changes, our industry is experiencing unprecedented external changes. It's interesting that our Christian music industry has both grown and become consolidated simultaneously. I guess sometimes you have to prune the tree to make room for new fruit. In the past two years, we've seen mainstream corporations devour some of our most powerful Christian companies. These takeovers have reignited and fanned the flame of controversy about the purpose of Christian entertainment. I remember the concerns a few years back when EMI was beginning to expand. Fear and trembling ensued, with some worrying our industry would be corrupted and the "heathen" would be at the helm. EMI bought Sparrow, Star Song and ForeFront, among other companies. Then, Zomba corporation purchased Brentwood, Benson and Reunion while Gaylord Entertainment acquired Z Music TV and, recently, Word and Myrrh. For this article, we talked with some of the "players" in our industry. We asked them: how the mainstream companies have affected us; how are we doing now; and where they think our future lies.

Roland Lundy (Word, Myrrh, Gaylord): "The state of our industry is pretty good right now. We've got some positive trends happening, retailers are watching inventory levels, returns are down, and backlist products are selling well. The mainstream companies have allowed us to continue to have creative control, while providing a larger base by allocating more capital, ultimately creating larger platforms."

Brandon Ebel (Tooth and Nail, BEC): "I think the mainstream markets and the Christian markets are going to become much closer. We're going to see

by frank chimento, associate publisher



some Christian labels going out of business, while many new independents will start up. It is getting easier to start a label and more difficult to keep one moving forward."

Robert Beeson (Essential, Sublime): "Modern rock/ alternative/modern music will continue to grow as a very viable format within the Christian music industry, as it becomes more relevant and accessible to a wider audience. The biggest growth potential is in this modern rock/modern music area. Zomba has allowed us to think more globally."

Joey Elwood (Gotee Records): "Only a few labels will actually get the attention of the mainstream markets. I think we are a little disillusioned with this whole mainstream thing. Our Christian retail environment is in trouble, and they are our foundation."

From my vantage point, these mainstream companies have been a blessing. We should applaud their efforts, while praying for their leaders. They can provide some needed business resources and platforms, while they rely on our Christian smarts and vision for ministry. We're only just beginning.

It's difficult to understand some of the negativity within our tiny business segment. We've never done better! Has someone checked the latest sales charts for Jars Of Clay, dc Talk, Newsboys, Third Day, MxPx? Just this week Caedmon's Call (whom you read about last March in 7ball) stunned the industry with a remarkable first week on SoundScan. As we go to press, The Insyderz (see our "New Voices," this issue) jumped from #71 to #17 in one week. These are hardly the signs of a failing industry. And in all of that, we are also presenting the Gospel with more integrity and authority than ever before.

Our industry is growing up and right now we've reached adolescence. It's an awkward stage, but it doesn't last forever. As the ugly caterpillar transforms into a beautiful butterfly, so will our stringy weed of an industry blossom into a radiant sunflower. It is unlikely

that Christian music will ever achieve the economic success enjoyed by the general market, but then again they don't experience the satisfaction we enjoy by serving Christ. All things considered, I prefer the latter.

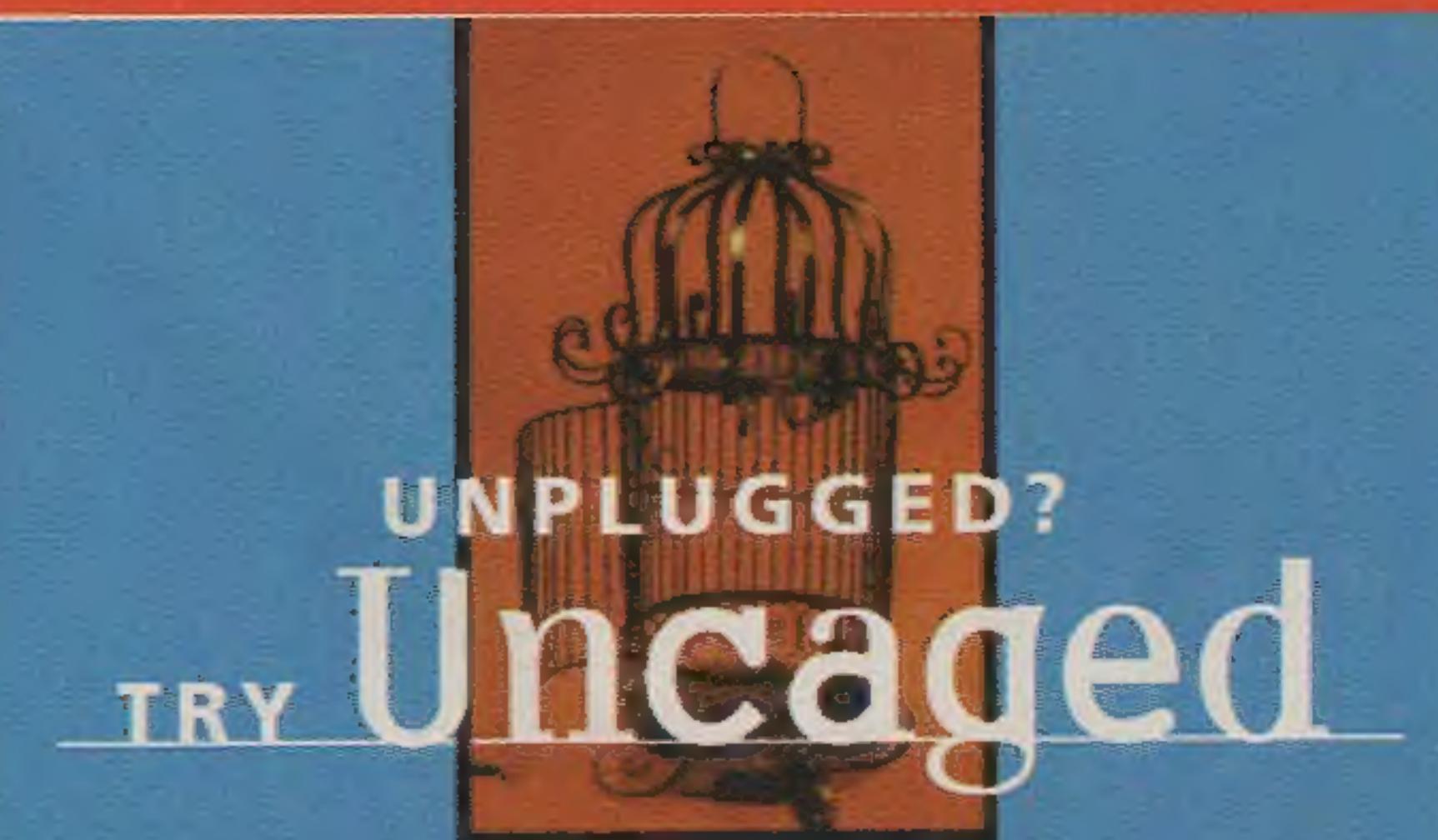
We can't stay where we are forever. The answer to our question of how we reconcile our dual role in ministry and business is to embark on a journey beyond our own subculture. It is the only way we can accomplish the Great Commission and achieve business success. Is it possible that our years of work in obscurity and scorn by the mainstream was a grace from God? He has sustained and nurtured us while we matured.

As you see in the pages of 7ball, the industry is currently putting out some great music for our generation, with bands like All Star United, The Supertones, The Insyderz, Plumb and Grammatrain, to name a few. Over the next few years we'll witness unprecedented economic growth in Christian music. Ultimately, it will take place in the youth and young adult markets (both Christian and non-Christian). We are changing and we are growing and we can do more. Our glass is half full and half empty.

Today, our music represents the Gospel to this generation in a more culturally relevant way than ever before. If you've ever been to a Supertones show, you know what I mean; these guys can preach and entertain. We think that once you've seen the Insyderz in concert you'll agree they are anointed men of God and also fun to be around.

The future is in your (the music fan) hands—and we at 7ball hear you speaking out. We will continue to champion those artists who have something of value to say. Join with us in prayer, as we enter into a spirit of true repentance and as Christian music booms into the future. Pray that our hearts will be ready and that God will correct us when we're wrong. Rejoice with us as we enter into a great revival among the youth or—as we like to call it—a cultural revolution.

We thank those record label executives who took the time to talk with us.



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7ball hype issue
special cover feature

the NEW voices of modern music

As we head into the big industry season known as GMA Week (the annual Gospel Music Association Convention, where many of the record labels, artists, organizations and retailers converge on Nashville to schmooze, exchange ideas and catch up on what's what in Christian music), and as we barrel down on the second anniversary of *7ball* magazine, it seemed like a good time to spotlight seven of the brand-new artists in modern music whom we think are going to be a big deal.

Obviously, this list is not a "seven best"—the heartening thing is that 1997 is shaping up to be a very strong year for modern rock and modern pop fans. There are several artists whom we think will break through to the pop audience (Christian or mainstream) this year, many of whom were strong contenders for our list. All Star United, Fold Zandura, Dryve, Sarah Jahn, Caedmon's Call, The Supertones, Value Pac. However, with the exception of Value Pac, these are all artists whom we have already given extraordinary press (in the case of Sarah Jahn, she appeared last month in our sister publication, *RELEASE*). We have already endorsed them as artists whom we think will do very well.

In the spirit of *7ball*—always looking to the future—we decided to introduce you to the next buzz artists. Several of the artists we have previously covered are proving our instincts to be accurate—All Star United and Caedmon's Call have shot out of the gates and onto the sales charts following our coverage. And since The Supertones and Value Pac are within weeks of their second releases, we felt it would actually be a disservice to include them here.

So, we have arrived at the 1997 "*7ball* hype issue" special cover feature, "The New Voices of Modern Music." You are reading about these artists for the first time. We guarantee it won't be the last.

FLIP THIS PAGE TO SEE THE NEW VOICES OF MODERN MUSIC.

By Chris Well

It's rare when a national audience gets the chance to see the early formation of a band. Usually, unless you're from the band's hometown, you don't actually hear about them until after they've spent time in the garage and at local events, waiting until that big break comes. And then they make a record.

With Plumb, it went a little differently. The project came first, and then the band.

But the five members want you to know, they *are* a band. "The record was being finished as the band was being formed," drummer Joe Porter says, "simultaneously."

Lead singer Tiffany Arbuckle came first, with experience singing background for a number of artists, including Lisa Bevill and Benjamin. While *Plumb* could have been a solo project, she liked the idea of a 'band identity' better. Joe, guitarist

Stephen Leiweke



plumb

and keyboardist Matt Stanfield were some of the studio musicians drafted by producers Matt Bronleewe and Dan Haseltine. They stuck around and were joined by bassist J.J. Plasencio, formerly of Sixpence None the Richer.

Although it might seem a bit backwards—the record before the band—they aren't worried about it. They proved they can rock—and, as a unit—at their very first public performance, The GAS Tour in Kissimmee, Fla., last March. "I think everyone else worried about it more than we did," Stephen says. "Everybody was asking how we were going to pull it off. We just kind of did. We look at the record as an art form. We've taken the songs and essentially made them our own for the live show."

Matt agrees. "We have a sound we're trying to go for, obviously, but within the arrangements, we've given ourselves the freedom to work off each other."

"The live show gives them the chance to put their thumbprint on things,"

Tiffany adds. "But they wouldn't be members of Plumb if they felt like the sound of Plumb wasn't them. They heard it and said, *That's something I want to do*. It's not just that some other musicians put this record together and now this band is trying to emulate it."



J.J. likens the situation to his early days with Sixpence. "When I came on board there, there was already an album, *The Fatherless and the Widow*. Then we all became a band and did *This Beautiful Mess*. I'm looking forward to that 'glueness' of all the different members of Plumb becoming a band. It's exciting. I'm really excited to see what's happened in the few times that we've already played together."

Another challenge is playing the record live. While the layers of guitars and drums loops are one thing in the studio, the band members refuse to lean on tracks to bring them to life. "We want to be as live as possible," Tiffany says.

"Except for the bass," J.J. jokes. "I'm on DAT."

"J.J. is actually one giant MIDI sequencer," Stephen quips.

The members of Plumb admit there was a lot of wrestling over just how to arrange the songs. For example, Joe says, some songs have five guitar parts at the same time. "Stephen had a big job to combine them," he

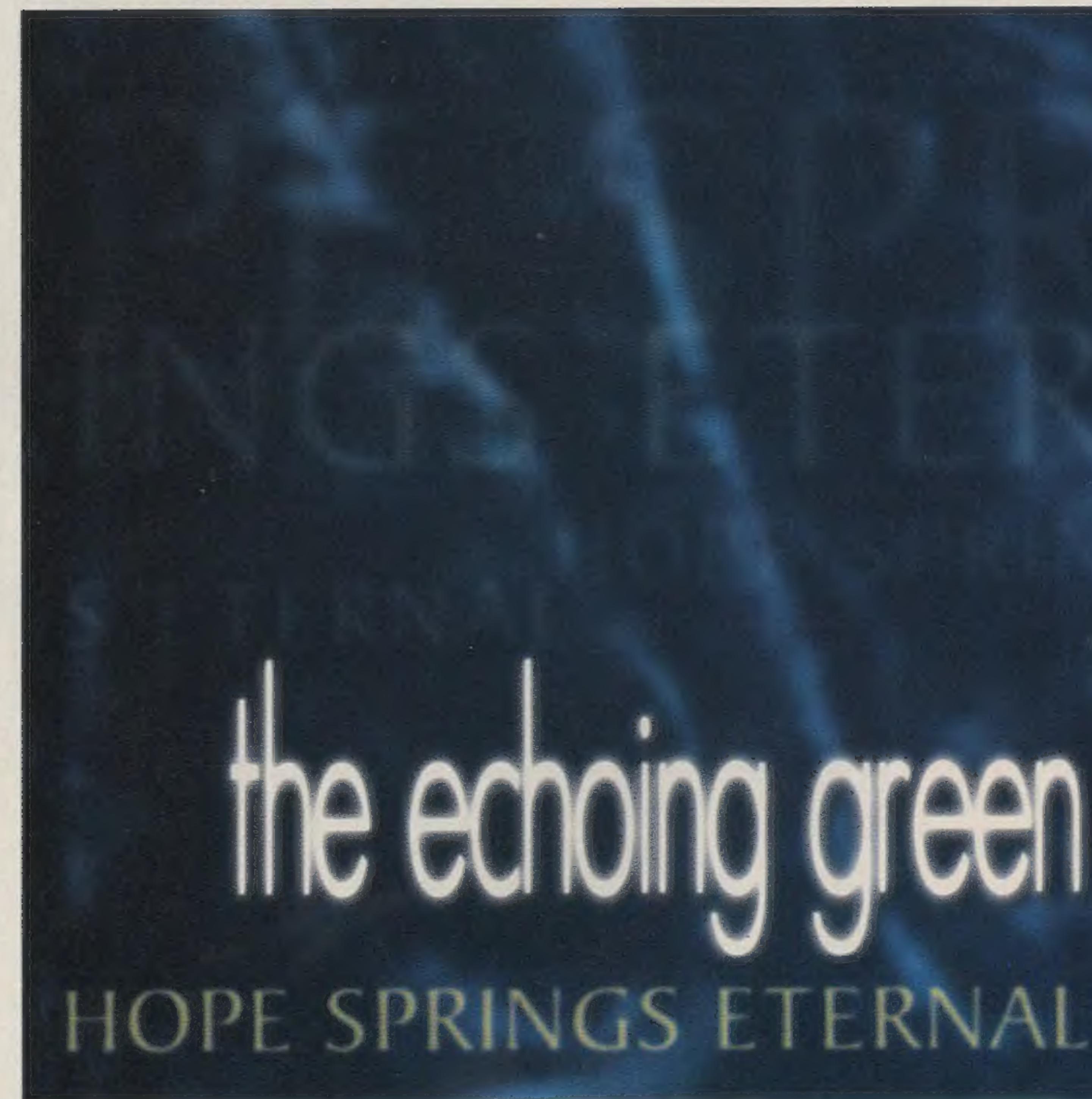
says. "In fact, there are times when he's playing three parts at once."

"Of course," Tiffany jokes, "he has twelve fingers."

"Our first goal," Joe continues, "was to make our live sound as big as possible, to make the sound as full. There are so many layers on the record, that's the first thing people say, *Man, this just sounds so big*."

Of course, there aren't just a lot of layers—there are a lot of musical reference points, as well. One song mixes hip-hop groove with Aerosmith hard rock guitar licks and floating, Steely Dan chords; another track remixes Enya for the dance floor; yet another is Kim Wilde gone space age. It's difficult to describe them, but J.J. takes a stab: "If you were to turn on your car radio full blast and

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just grabbed the dial and go all the way from one side to the other," he says, "at the end you'd have a Plumb song."

"Except for the country stations," Joe corrects.

"Seriously," Stephen says, "everyone asks us what we sound like, and we don't know what to tell them."

"It sounds like Plumb," Tiffany says.

"Our goal is to establish that as a reference," Joe says.

Tiffany continues, "Sometimes, I wish I could tell somebody, *It's kind of a cross between this and that*, so, at least, they could have an idea. But I can't."

"Not to slam anyone," Tiffany continues, "but there are a lot of college bands coming out that are cool for a couple of years because they're doing something really trendy, and then they're done. We'd like to be a little more professional and say, *Yeah, we hope you enjoy the show and have fun*, but at the same time there's a musical appreciation, there's actually a gift being used and not just screaming and yelling and playing really loud just to create a false sense of, *They were really good*. Well, they were just loud and obnoxious."

"We want to create something timeless," Stephen says. "If you put a Peter Gabriel album in that's 10 years old, it's still cool. We want to do something timeless, not just this style for the sake of being hip right now."

They also hope the lyrics are more memorable than the usual "Christian bumpersticker" fare. *Plumb* is filled with themes of pain and loss and insecurity, all resolved only in the hope of God—and yet, as Tiffany points out, the answers are never flippant or easy. "The message in every song is intentionally left for the listener to decide what that means to them," Tiffany says. "Like the song 'Who Am I?' That could tell someone, *What I'm going through must mean nothing compared to the pain of the person sitting next to me. I should be thankful how little I go through*. To someone else, it could mean, compared to Christ, *Why am I complaining, look at what Jesus Christ went through for me*. Or it could mean, *That's just a really cool song*."

could mean so many different things."

She says the biggest part of Plumb's ministry is how they interact with listeners and fans, on and off the stage. Tiffany relates about one life that was touched: During a radio interview before a concert, the members were asked about the song "Unforgivable."

Tiffany explained how the song is about a girl she went to high school with who was verbally abused by her stepfather.

"At the venue that night, there was a lady who said she was disciplining a girl that was verbally, emotionally and physically abused by both her adopted parents," Tiffany continues. "She had heard us talk about the song, so she told this girl about us and about the concert. The girl came to the show, she met us and she was really sweet."

The girl was out in the audience for the show. As soon as "Unforgivable" started—with the first line, "I'm never told that I am pretty"—the girl soon broke into tears and left the concert, saying she was afraid she would get beaten and had to go home.

"We were overwhelmed when we heard about that and just prayed for her," Tiffany says. "Even though she didn't stay for the show, a seed was planted. Now she knows there is somebody else out there who is like her, and there is someone she can talk to. Someone gave her our P.O. box so she could write to us."

"It doesn't matter to me if she heard every song and every lyric and understood it. She heard one line and it made her think about what's going on in her life. That makes what we do for a living so joyful. It was just a payoff to me that one life could be helped through that one concert, and she didn't even hear the third song."

Ultimately, Tiffany says, if God



(THE EXPLOSIVE BULLETPROOF DEBUT)

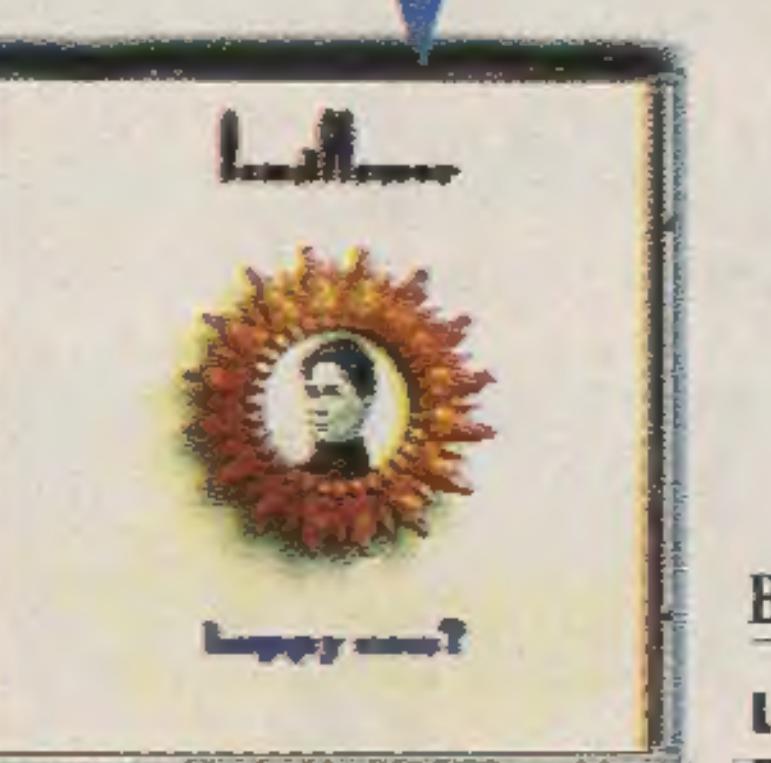
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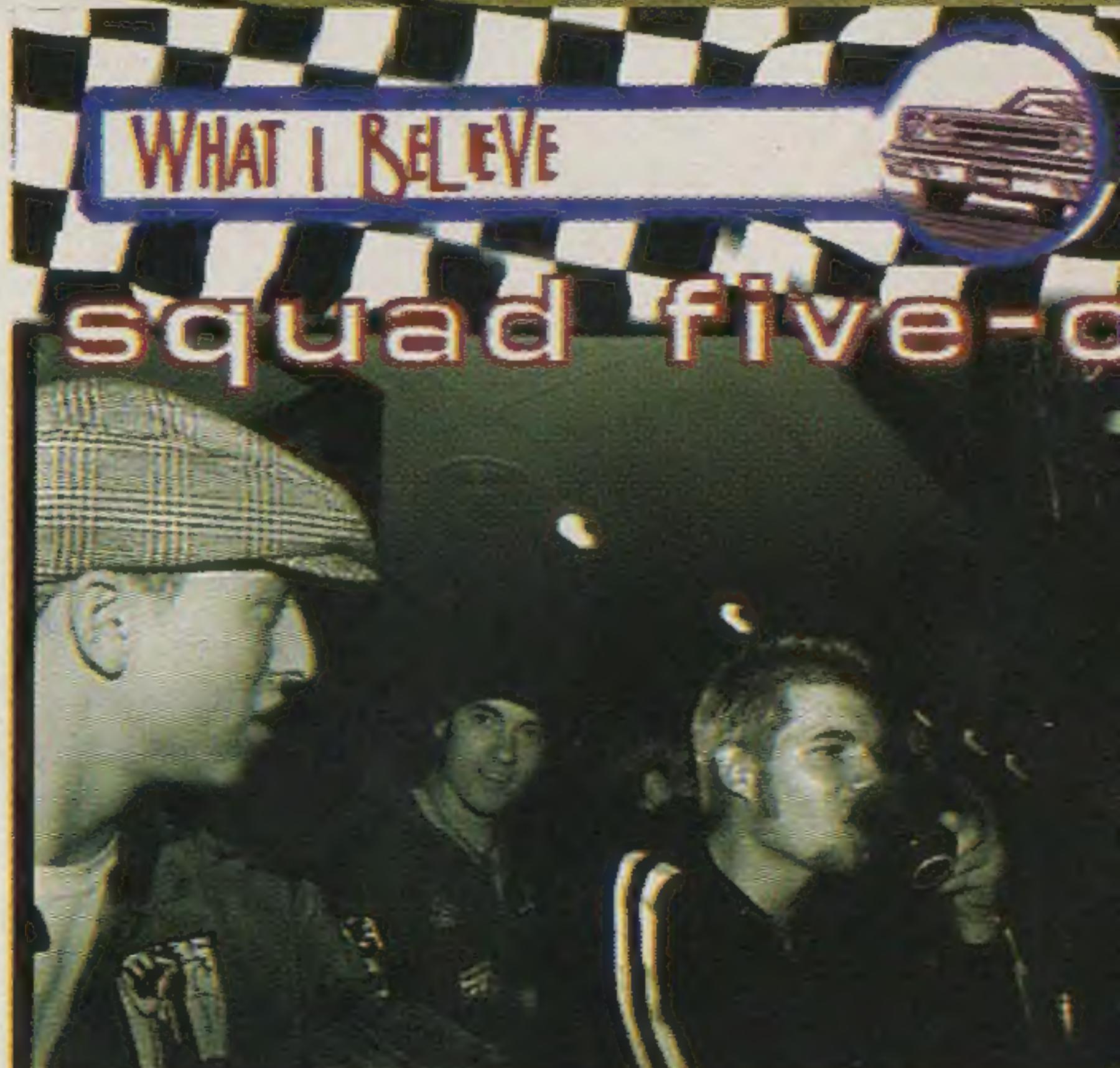
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tape recorder went on the blink. Summoning Weeble-like resolve, pen in hand, I did my own furious version of shorthand.

The "Weeble Syndrome" is so familiar to The Insyderz that the group actually wrote a little number about the toys, which appears on its debut album, *Motor City Ska*. It's been a whirlwind eight months for the band from suburban Detroit, starting with an impromptu concert at last year's Cornerstone Festival. The phenomenal response to that event almost instantly led to a record deal. Not bad for a band of 19- to 26-year-olds who helped revive a musical style gaining new momentum in both the Christian and mainstream arenas.

Yerke picks up the story. "We went to C'Stone last year on our own and tried to get on a stage to play. Nobody would take a chance on us, so we rented a generator and started playing at our campsite. We got a bigger response than even we expected.

[Record executive] Michael Sean Black just happened to walk by and hear us and when he saw the response of the crowd, he invited us to play at one of the sponsored stages, called 'The Purple Leopard Lounge.' We did very well, and when [producer/artist] Gene Eugene heard us play, he signed us to Brainstorm. That label had some financial difficulties, and our contract was sold to Gumshoe."

THE INSYDERZ

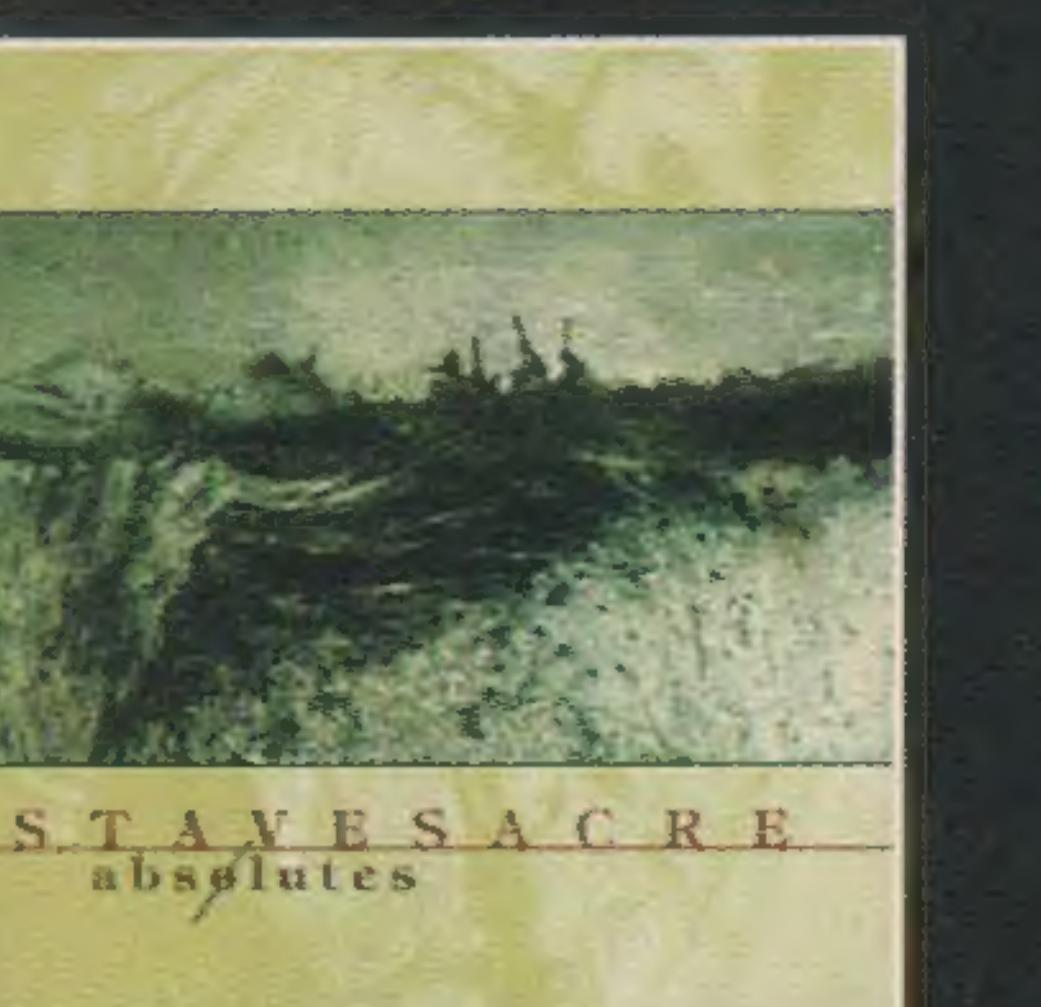
similar impact for Christ on people." Miesch was also a "hair band" fan and has a fondness for Latin rhythms. Rowland was always intrigued by the possibilities of "incorporating horns into rock music." He and Brown rank as the old softies in the band, with Rowland claiming a love for soft-rockers Chicago, while Brown likes to mellow out to the crooning of Harry Connick, Jr. Both harbor an infatuation for big band music, to which Basil jokingly adds, "Big band stinks!" He prefers hard and fast rock, citing Jane's Addiction and The Cure as major influences. This diversity struck a chord with Sjogren, who listens to everything from the blues rock of the Allman Brothers to hardcore punk to brass bands. And Yerke? Well, he says, "I just listen to anything that sounds good."

The Insyderz began a little over a year ago as the idea of Yerke and Sjogren, high school buddies who realized the need for a good Christian ska band. Sjogren says, "There just wasn't any Christian ska. The Supertones were just getting started, but beyond that, there was nothing that we knew of. Ska was just coming into its third wave. It used to have a pretty defined sound, but now, more than ever, you can incorporate all kinds of sounds and styles into it." So the two set out to find musicians who shared their vision of bringing Christ into the ska scene.

Yerke picks up the story. "We went to C'Stone last year on our own and tried to get on a stage to play. Nobody would take a chance on us, so we rented a generator and started playing at our campsite. We got a bigger response than even we expected.

THEY'RE COMING...

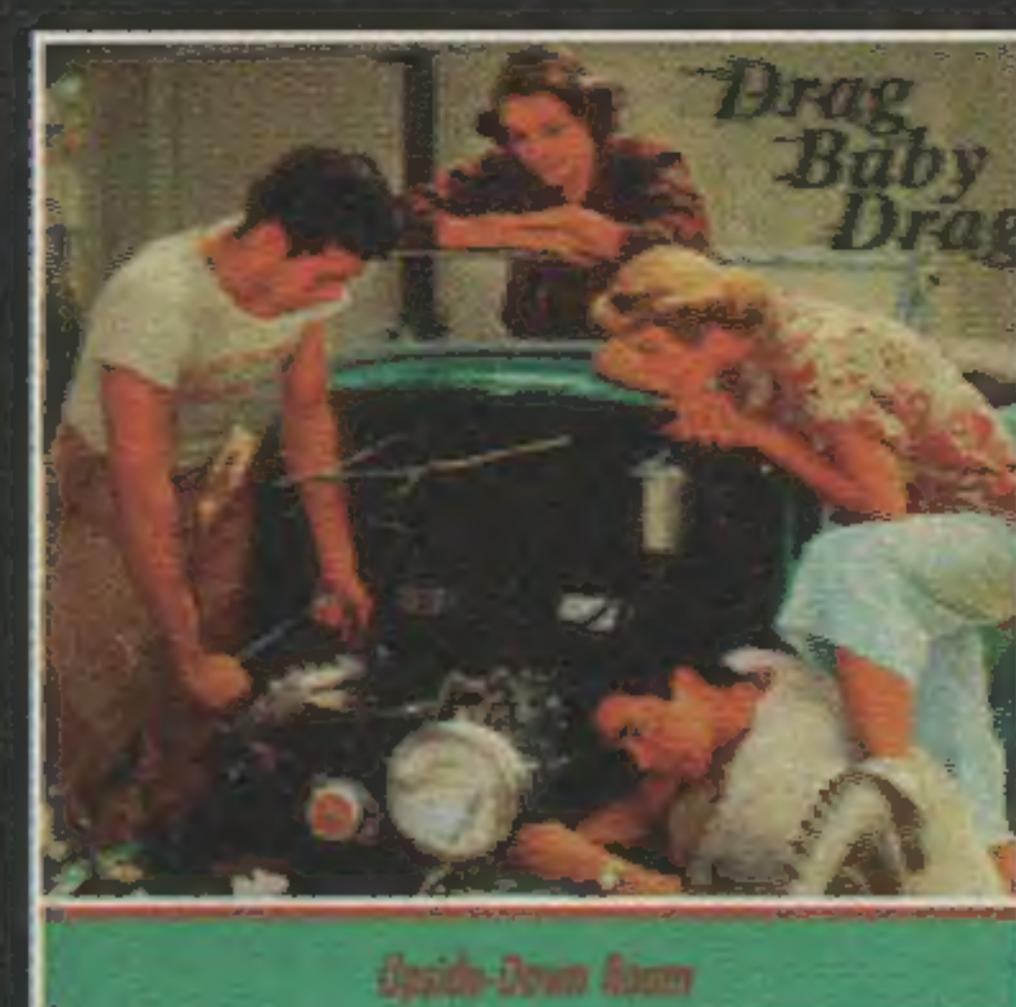
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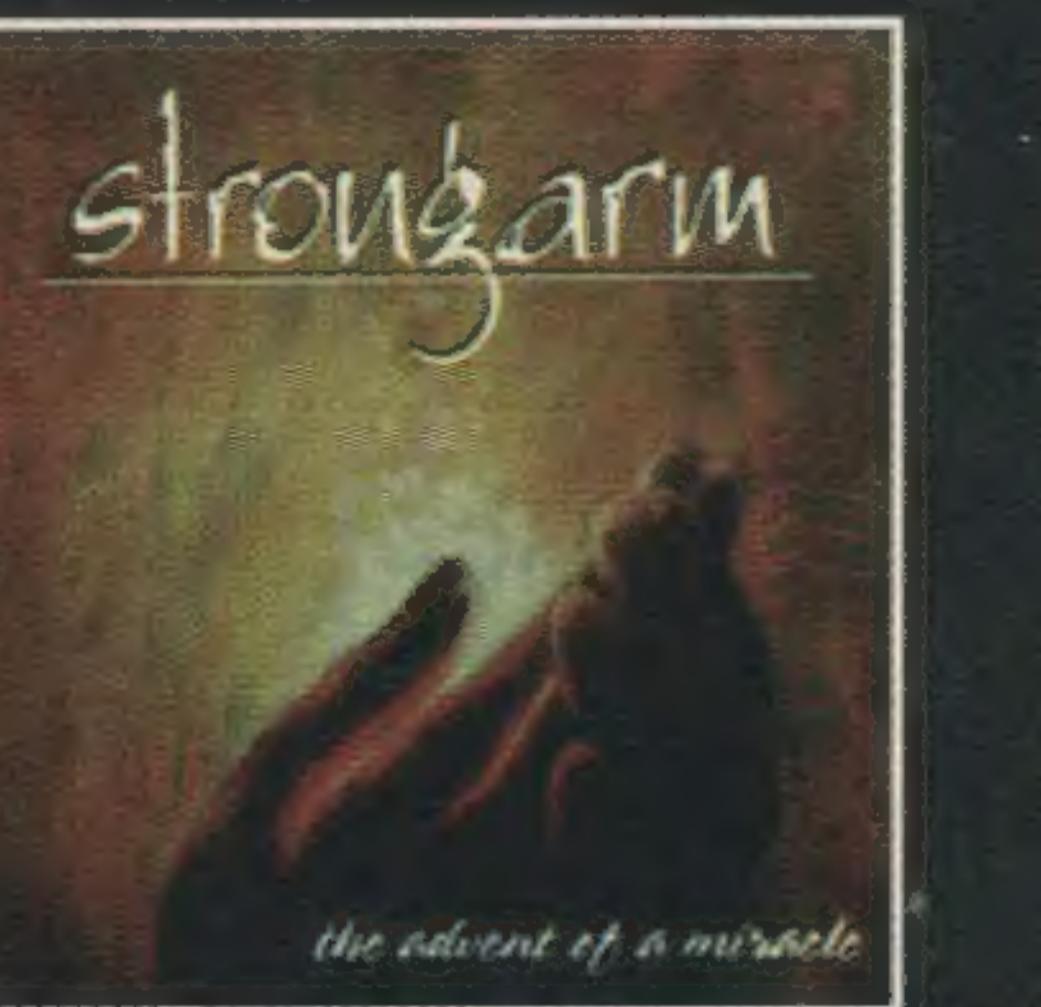
KLANK - Still Suffering
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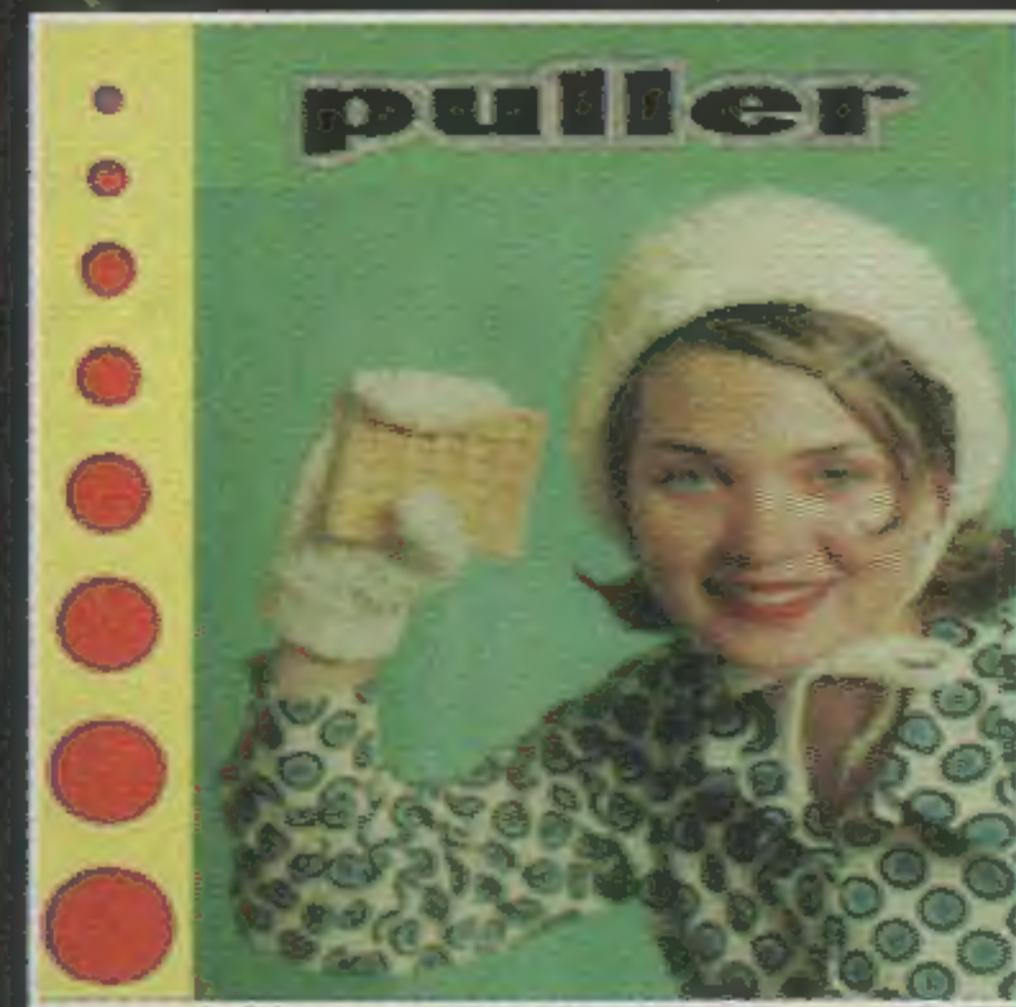
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ZAO - The Splinter Shards The Birth Of Separation - CD/CS/LP



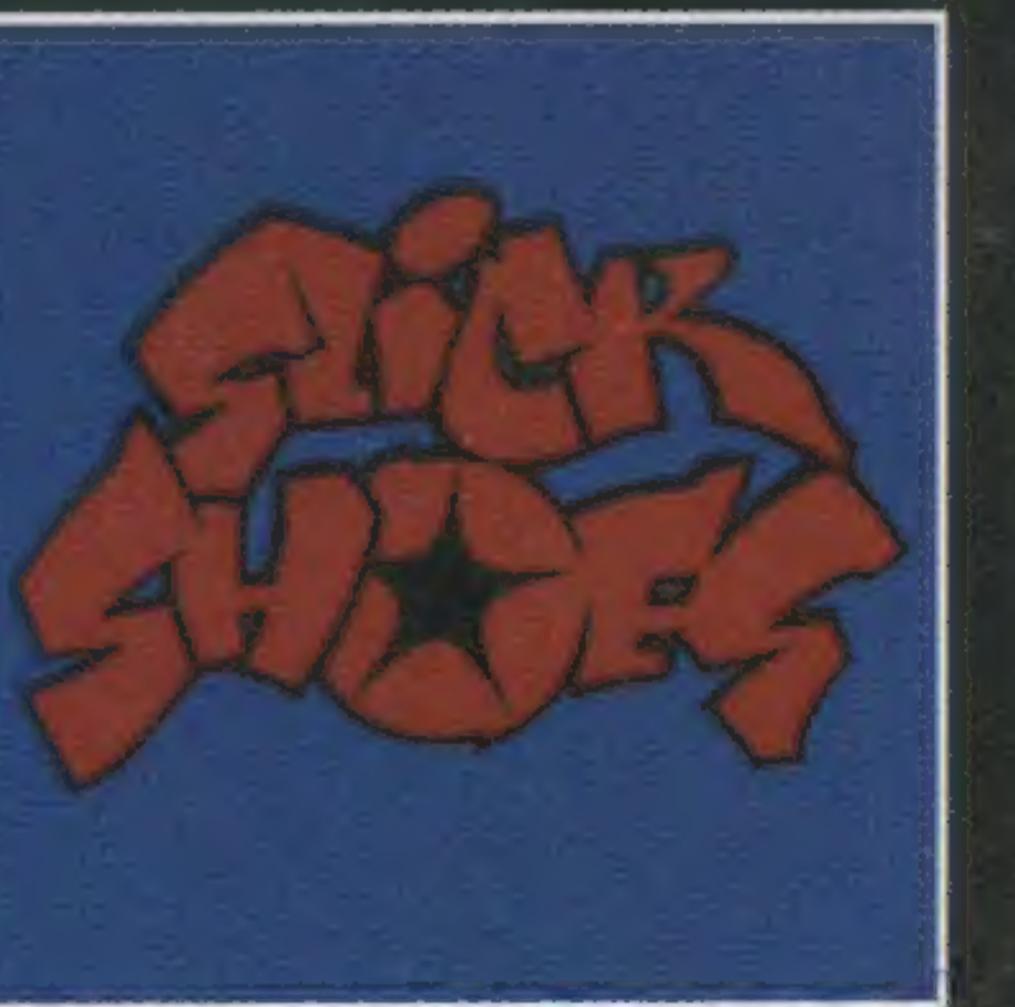
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instruments and just talk to them. We have eight members, including our road manager. So if each of us talks with five people, half the crowd is covered. If we played for 4,000 people, sheer numbers would prevent that, although God can work in any situation. We want to stay accessible to the kids. That goes for everything, from the music to the price of a ticket or a T-shirt."

McCarthy adds, "We have to pray for God to move. We can't make God show up. I have to say, *God, I can't do it. It's in Your hands.* Sometimes people say, *Great job,* or, *Nice music,* rather than, *God is good,* which is what we really like to hear."

Accountability is a major issue with The Insyderz. Miesch says, "It's scary to me. If I say from the stage, *Read your Bible, pray every day and you'll grow, grow, grow,* and I don't practice what I preach, I'm a liar. What I'm saying on stage has to match what I'm doing offstage."

With so many doors opening for them, it seems the natural thing for The

Insyderz to do would be to jump on tour with a major act, right? Think again. Says Sjogren, "We have a lot of offers on the table right now. It would be very predictable for us to go on a large tour. But what it comes down to is that we don't want to hang around as someone's opening act and just play."

According to Sjogren, tours shouldn't be about competition and success. To The Insyderz, it's an issue of need. "We want to be where we're needed, playing where God specifically wants The Insyderz to be His tools. To this point, we haven't had confirmation from God about doing any large tours. We're perfectly content going out by ourselves."

That would seem to be a risky move for a brand-new, full-time band. In most cases, going out on your own would also mean fending for yourselves. But Wasil says this hasn't been a problem. "One of the most encouraging things for us is going from town to town and meeting a lot of

awesome people. Many of them will put us up for the night and feed us, not because we're a great band, but because they believe in what we do." So what might seem a risk to some other bands in the same position is a well-rewarded leap of faith to The Insyderz.

The next phase in the rapid-fire development of Christian ska begins on what The Insyderz call "The Rebel Alliance Tour." "Everything we do this year will be a part of the tour," explains Sjogren. "It's rebellion against self and alliance with the body of Christ."

Flying in the face of convention. Creating their own signature out of a combination of existing sounds. Listening to Jesus when others question the wisdom of their career moves. These are the challenges facing these live-action "Weebles of ska."

Unlike their toy counterparts, they may actually fall. But bank on this: Soon enough, The Insyderz will be right back up in your face. ☺



By Mike Parker

It's 5 p.m. Thursday. Reality Check has been at EMI Records headquarters doing interviews all day. Their responses start to run together after awhile, they say. Everybody asks

the same questions, so inevitably they get the same answers. Sometimes, says the band, your mind runs on automatic pilot.

So we go bowling.

Chris Blaney is busy tearing up the

backboards on video basketball while the rest of us rent shoes, and begin to diligently play "Goldilocks" with the community bowling balls: That one is too heavy; the finger holes on that one are too small; this one is just right!

"So, what do you guys do for relaxation?" I ask. "Do you get together much when you're off the road?"

"Usually, when we get back from a weekend, we won't hang out with each other for a couple of days," says Chris, who has finished his video game and joins the group. "Like this last weekend. We spent 40 hours together on the bus going back and forth between our home and Miami. We needed a break from each other."

"But we're really good friends," adds Nathan Barlowe. "It's amazing, everybody is really easy going, totally hanging out. This isn't

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just our job. We don't come to work, clock in and get on the bus. We're like brothers."

"And sometimes, like brothers, you don't want to see each other at all," laughs Chris, "but we love each other, joke with each other, walk around the mall together, whatever."

Chris (vocals) is a snowboard fanatic, sometimes hitting the slopes with dc Talk's Michael Tait. Rod Schuler (vocals) likes to read poetry and literature, and shoot hoops. Nathan (lead vocals and guitar) enjoys keeping current on Nashville's thriving music scene. "It's cool every once in a while to be on the other side of the stage," he says.

He offers this observation: "Soul Coughing was playing, and one thing I picked up on is that nobody in the audience really got an opportunity to know anything about the band, what they care about or what they think about. I mean, the band was out of this world—they were great—but they just got up there and let their songs stand for themselves. That's good in one respect, but one of the things I like about the Christian music industry is that it's standard to talk to the crowd. You get an opportunity to pour yourself out, to get real with the audience."

By now, Dave Muckle (horns and vocals) has taken the lane and made it abundantly clear that, whatever else the guys in Reality Check do in their free time, they don't do much bowling. The 5-year-old in the next lane has just knocked down seven pins to Dave's two. He points out in his defense that the 5-year-old has bumpers in her gutters. Good point.

Rod follows Dave with slightly better results, but it soon becomes painfully obvious that it's a good thing these guys can sing (not that I bowl much better). Chris ends the game with three strikes in the tenth to take top honors with a 136. I edge out Rod with an 89.

Since it's a little hard to use my tape recorder with the deafening noise of all those bowling balls running into all those pins, and I'm tired of being embarrassed by the proficiency of the children on the next lane, I suggest a trip to McDonald's. The atmosphere there is decidedly quieter. The 5-year-olds are still there, but they can't embarrass us here. The tape player rolls and



the interview begins in earnest.

The band's original members, Chris, Nathan and Rod, met in January of 1992 while attending Liberty University. Early influences included everything from the Beastie Boys and The Cure to Stevie Wonder and Jimi Hendrix. The trio developed a unique blend of jazz/funk/hip-hop/rock that can best be described as '70s based alterna-funk fusion. Confused? OK, think of it as dc Talk, Newsboys, and Audio Adrenaline in a blender.

They spent the next four years building a reputation as an innovative, creative, and energetic band with a heart for kids and a knack for ministry. In 1996, Reality Check won the Gospel Music Association's Spotlight Best Artist award. Life has been a little more than hectic ever since.

"Winning the showcase gave us a lot of credibility," Chris says. "It also put us in a bigger spotlight. At the peak of it we had seven labels interested in us, which was kind of reaffirming.

"We knew we were following the Lord's calling, but we were beginning to wonder if it was ever going to get any bigger than it was. With the success of [previous Spotlight winner] Jars of Clay, it's like people thought, *Look how Jars turned out. We better latch on to these guys.*"

"That's the positive side," Nathan adds. "I think the negative side is because of the same thing. I think Jars' success has put more expectations on us. Rather than just being a band that's just coming out, we are the GMA National Spotlight winners, and there have been a lot of expectations put on the album and the band.

"That's some of the pressure we've been feeling. The funny thing to me is that we've been doing the same thing for five years. Nothing has changed, but now we're at ground zero again; we're at the point of being a new band again. It's like we're a 5-year-old overnight success."

Adding to the pressure of following in the footsteps of the phenomenally successful Jars of Clay are the near constant comparisons with fellow Liberty University alumni dc Talk. "I think we felt threatened by it for a

while because we wanted our own identity," Nathan explains.

"It's finally gotten to a point where we've become friends with those guys," he says. "We've earned their respect and they've had ours for years. I think it helps that Mike [Tait] sang on our record. Hopefully, the public will see we're not trying to copy them."

Chris says one problem is that the Christian market is small enough that any similarity gets magnified. "Now, anytime a group uses a violin or acoustic guitar, they get compared to Jars of Clay."

Rod adds that dc Talk paved the way for Reality Check, and many other bands, for that matter. "If it hadn't been for their success, what we do would not be understood at all. But, if you listen to the record, we don't sound like them. They've gone one direction and we have gone another, but what a compliment to be compared to them."

With their debut album hitting the street, Reality is beginning to set in for the Check'ers. A full slate of festivals, along with a 15-city bookstore parking lot tour will keep them on the road for most of the summer. "We just want to get out to where the people are," Chris says.

Record deals, video shoots, concert tours: It's all heady, exciting stuff. But the main focus of the band remains ministry. Reality Check sees itself as a tool for the church, and is willing to restructure its show to meet the needs of a particular audience. "We want to be servants," says Rod, with quiet force. "We want to decrease, so He can increase. That's the most important thing for us. It's the one thing that has remained constant."

"We come out and rock for 45 minutes and then we go into our acoustic set," Nathan says. "By the time we're finished, we've gotten them so involved in our show that they're focused on what we have to say."

"They trust us," Chris says. "And maybe, if they can trust us, then they can trust the God we serve. It's not like 50 percent of the kids at our shows get saved. But if it's just one kid, that's what it's all about. That's the reason we're doing this."

BRAINWASH PROJECTS



photos by matt vignall

By Brian Quincy Newcomb

It's no accident that Nashville band Say-So—a folk rock singer/songwriter duo consisting of wife/husband Kim and Jim Thomas—signed to a label called Organic Records. Assuming the moniker is something more accurate than a marketing ploy, the earthy, down-home, artful approach of theirs suits the label "organic."

"At the risk of rehashing," says Kim over the phone, "since I've used this term about myself before, as a lyricist and expressionist—I paint, I write stories, I've written books—I view myself more as a lightning rod than a lightning bolt. I hope to take life in, observe and absorb, and then send it out as best as I know how, as opposed to the big drama of a lightning bolt that's all 'snap, crack, and big bang.'

"For me," she continues, "it's hard to say that my writing process always looks like this, or I always do it this way. It's more about life being a long journey, and most of it is spent in the in-between. The drama is in the birth and the death, and the faithfulness is in the in-between. When I look around and see what I have the most inspiration about, most of the inspiration comes from the time in-between."

That's where all the uncertainty is: It's a drama—albeit less conclusive—in and of itself. "Absolutely," she agrees. "I use the example of the flying trapeze artist. There's surely on either end: You're holding on to that bar and you're swinging a million feet up in the air. But to get to the next bar you have to let go, and it's that part between each bar that is the scariest part. If I had my way, I would be a flying trapeze artist that holds on to both bars at the same time, but we don't call that a flying trapeze artist; that's called hanging from a bar up in the air."

Francois Seneton, who wrote *Christian Perfection*, is my hero of the last few years. I think what I learned from that book is the importance of living in the daily fidelities. That's what I want to write about: everyday life."

Say-So has recently let go of the bar in their professional musical career, releasing their first nationally distributed album. Although they've talked with a variety of major labels and released custom cassettes and eventually their own indie compila-

tion CD (*Laugh, Cry, Pray*), they feel this is the right time and right record deal for them. "Until we could partner with the right company," Kim says of the business of selling music, "it was a



the sense that a lot of the recordings in the past have been quick, do-it-in-the-house, if you come over and play on our record we'll cook you dinner, that type of thing. So there was a level of professionalism that was bumped up, which was really meaningful to me. Some of these songs are from *Laugh, Cry, Pray*. It's kind of the best of what we've done, plus some new ones. The first time you release something nationally, you look at your whole catalog. Eight of the songs we recorded from the ground up, and produced with Rick Will. Three songs were remixes of previously recorded songs; we went in and re-did a vocal or added a little something to it."

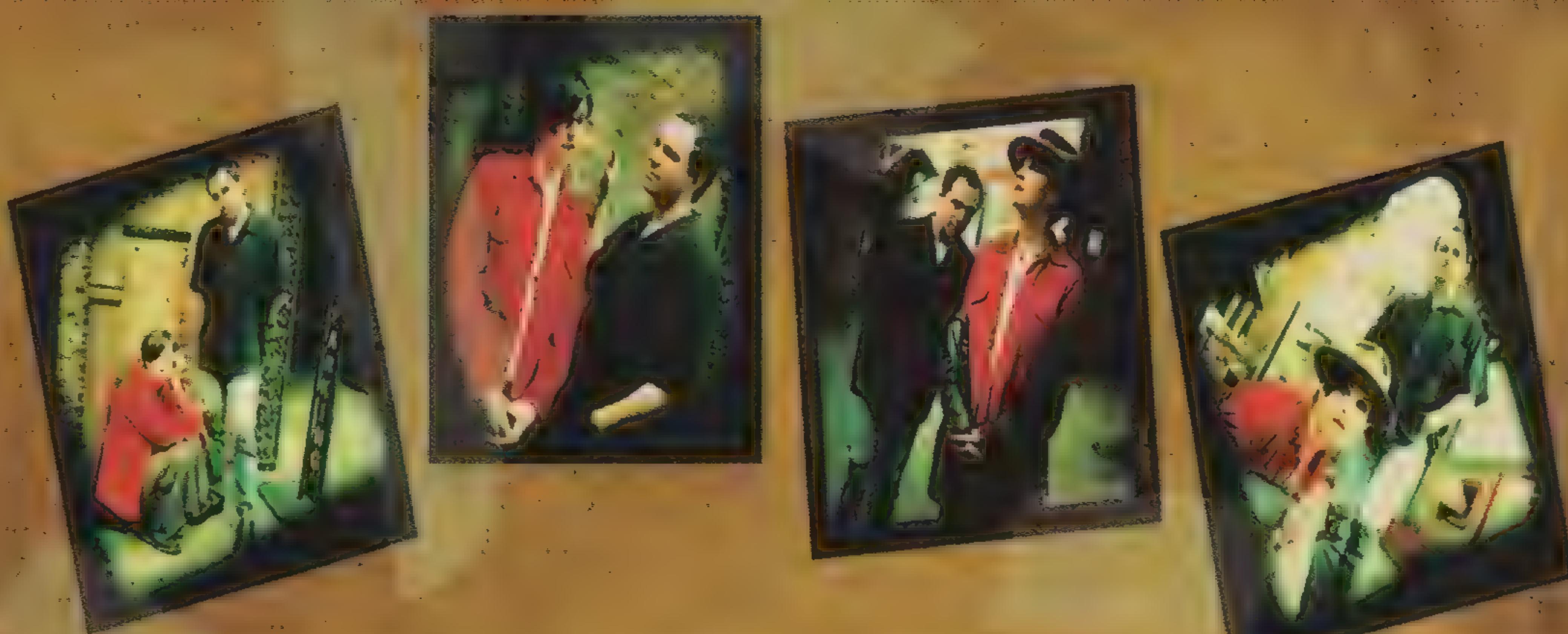
distraction. It chokes the art."

Jim concurs, "That's the last thing you want to do, spend all your energy doing that. We can't speak highly enough about the approach [of Organic]. They're like, you guys just do what you do and let us exploit it, and that for us is so comfortable."

"They're like the ideal mother-in-law," Kim suggests. Let's see, a great mother-in-law is quietly supportive and sends a timely check now and then. Indeed, the increased budget on this self-titled Organic Records debut is the most pronounced difference from previous Say-So recordings.

"You hope each new work that you put out is informed by your most recent experiences," Kim says. "That probably would be the case here. Whether the songs are deeper or not, I don't know, but they are more informed. It was a new experience for us in

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whatever. At some point, you have to go, *These things are not what make me significant.*"

"It's kind of the healthy rantings of an approval-addict, who has come to her senses," Kim says, as she lets go of the bar one more time.

Even for a married writing team, the collaborative process can be varied and unpredictable, says Kim. "Sometimes, he'll write a whole track and I'll go away and mess with it until I find the right mood and words. Sometimes I've come with a lyric or a chorus and he's worked from there."

"On rare occasions, I pain him with going off with the guitar and going 'plunk, plunk, plunk,' and coming back and going, *OK, here's the song.* He painfully sits down and goes, *OK, honey, come back in a while and I'll have it figured out.*"

Kim is quick to admit that while she may have the role of multi-instrumentalist in the band, her approach isn't exactly precise. "I always hesitate when people ask what instruments I play," she says, "because I may play them but I don't know if I play them right. I just plop my fingers down until it sounds right."

Jim comes to her defense. "She's taken very naturally to the accordion, for instance. People think, *Oh, it's just a couple keys, you squeeze this thing and it makes noise,* but phrasing, and making it smooth is a real art."

The phrase "Takes naturally to the accordion" is not one of those *7ball* readers will easily comprehend, I suggest. "It's a very, very sweet instrument," Kim says. "It's very emotional."

Say-So have been making music long enough that it's apparent they've found their own artistic niche. Nonetheless, they are influenced by what they hear in other artists. "For me," Kim says, "some earlier influences have been Natalie Merchant, Sam Phillips, Aimee Mann, Sheryl Crow—that type of female artists."

"I always want to find who's doing the best work in their genre and that's who I want to be influenced by—who's doing excellent work. That challenges me to squeeze that next level out of my own work."

By Chad Bonham

Pegging a band's musical style after one song can be a fun game for all music expert types. Regular music fans like to play this game, too. Nine times out of 10, it's not difficult to nail down a long list of the band's influences before the first lyric is uttered.

That 10th spot, however, is reserved for bands like Silage, a Grass Valley (Sacramento), Calif., outfit whose sound can change dramatically from one song to the next.

"There are some boundaries," guitarist Lance Black says. "We like to keep the

from the off-the-wall influences of lead singer/trombone player Damian Horne. Horne thanks Huey Lewis & The News, The Beach Boys, The Beatles and high school jazz band for his musical stylings.

And as chaotic as the sound of Silage may seem, Horne claims there is a method to the madness. "Part of our goal is to keep things interesting," he says. "There are a lot of good bands who stick to one style of music, but there are a lot of bands whose music sounds the same the whole time and after the first few songs, they start to blend together. The way we design our live shows is to break it up and try to keep it more interesting."



silage

happy vibe going on. But pretty much, we just combine all of our influences. From that, it's whatever comes out."

The musical boundaries surrounding Silage are loose-fitting, to say the least. The band's debut album, *Watusi*, combines elements of ska, rap, punk and '60s beach pop together in one quirky package. This eclectic band gets most of its songwriting inspiration

Silage's ska influence can be directly attributed to Horne and Clark's high school band experience.

There, Horne played trombone while Clark handled the saxophone. The two later formed a group that served as a local youth group's praise & worship band. Lance Black came on board next, and most recently, younger brother Shane joined as bass player.

Black has no problem confessing his initial dislike for the presence of trombone within Silage. Horne's use of the instrument was one of the first indications that the

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band's music was soon to stray from a predictable modern rock sound. "I didn't like it at first," Black admits. "We just decided to try it because he knew how to play it. We didn't really know what ska was at the time, but we got good feedback and decided to keep it."

A lot has changed since the band's fledgling days. Now, Black can be seen proudly wearing a "Skankin' Pickle" T-shirt in publicity photos. Silage is taking the ska thing a step further this summer, as it will travel with a trumpet player throughout its festival tour.

After getting good reviews on its spring tour and at a successful spot at the debut GAS Tour festival in Kissimmee, Fla., Silage is finally seeing the culmination of a dream that began five years ago. The band had an idea a future in music was possible, but even as recently as last year, it never took that idea too seriously.

After signing with an experienced artist management team, things started moving quickly. Sub-Lime Records' Bob Wahler saw the band by accident while checking out its soon-to-be labelmate, Pep Squad. Two months later, Silage was signed

and working on its debut album.

As easy as it sounds, Horne affirms there were plenty of rough times along the way. "We've gone through a lot of obstacles and God's opened a lot of doors for us," he admits. "We wouldn't be where we are now if He didn't want us to be doing this. We just kind of take it day by day."

Silage is especially excited about this summer's schedule, which is based heavily around the growing festival scene. After opening for Fold Zandura and All Star United during the spring, the young band got plenty of pointers to prepare them for the upcoming madness. But while in Florida recently, the band played a secular club that put them back in touch with the kind of people for whom they'd been performing just months earlier.

"We really had a heart for the people there," Horne recalls. "We're excited to play the festivals this summer, but we also want to be able to do more secular club shows, just so we don't get sheltered."

The Sacramento club scene—of which Silage was a part—is one of the country's surprising hotbeds for new music.

Bands like Cake, The Deftones and Mother Hips are just a few big names to make it out of the unassuming Northern California city. Silage is particularly proud of Sacramento's love affair with hometown band Tesla and the still-prevalent glam rock scene. It was likewise, in Sacramento's club scene, where Silage realized they wanted to use a positive sound to convey their positive message.

Through singing—and sometimes rapping—straightforward lyrics that Horne says are often inspired by the wacky humor of Shel Silverstein (the children's poet responsible for such oddities as *Where The Sidewalk Ends*), the band finds its message often reaching a very receptive audience.

"It's a lot easier to minister to a crowd that's happy and into it," Black says. "The whole happy, fun thing goes deeper than the music," Horne adds. "We want it to come across in our stage presence so people will know that the reason we're smiling is because of the joy we've found in Christ. We want to help people get excited about their relationship with Christ."

smalltown poets

By Bruce A. Brown

It's an unseasonably warm spring day at 7ball Laboratories, an unassuming building tucked away in a secluded part of the Nashville suburbs. Ardent/ForeFront artists Smalltown Poets have just dropped by, midway through a whirlwind promotional tour which will introduce their self-titled debut album to most of the civilized world.

After lunching on world-famous Whitt's barbecued pork sandwiches (only \$1.20 on Wednesdays!), the band ambles back across the parking lot and into the heart of the 7ball complex, for a brief acoustic concert. The unplugged setting proves to be a perfect



framework for the band's melodic, rootsy rock. Keyboardist Danny Stephens toodles on a melodica (it's bigger than a harmonica and smaller than a synthesizer); guitarist Kevin "New Guy" Breuner plunks on a Guild flat-top; drummer Byron Goggin uses a small snare drum (and his leg) for percussion; bassist Miguel DeJesus finds himself with two extra strings and plays rhythm guitar while lead singer Michael Johnston warbles into an unplugged mic ("Force of habit," he quips). The Poets survey a brief set of new tunes, and after getting the thumbs up from our Director of

Operations ("It's music Tammie likes!"), the band and I step onto the porch for a chat. Villanelle, a band which some of the Poets used to play in, is the first, and somewhat delicate, subject I address.

BAB: Can I say the "V" word here?

Danny: We tend to say that three of us have played in another band, or three of us have played together for years. This band is so new and fresh, not to mention that the very

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thing about Smalltown Poets that seems to make it work is these two guys right here (points to Kevin and Miguel). They've given a whole different spin to the lyrics Michael and I write, as far as the music they provide.

BAB: So Miguel, you came in about a year ago, after working on sessions around Nashville?

Miguel: I made a lot of good contacts from that. But I was mainly working in a warehouse, trying to pay the rent, so I could stay in Nashville. It wasn't until around this time last year that I felt like I was doing what I wanted to be doing, which was playing full-time with a band I believed in.

Byron: Miguel really stepped out in faith at that point, because it's not easy leaving a secure financial situation to do something that doesn't have any security at all. He overcame that struggle and moved right on.

Miguel: I told them, *If I feel like this is God's will, I'm going to do it, no matter what's in it financially.* [Finances are] not the reason this band makes any decision. We base it on what we believe the will of God to be. That's the step I took.

BAB: Miguel, are you from Atlanta originally? I detect a slightly different accent. [Laughter all around]

Miguel: My family is actually from Puerto Rico. We moved to Atlanta in 1980. From '90 to '93, I went to Greenville College, in Illinois—the same school Jars and Sarah Jahn went to. In '93, I moved to Nashville, then this past November, I moved back to Atlanta.

Danny: You left off the part about those couple of records you played on ...

Miguel: Yeah. I got to play on Sarah Jahn's Warner Alliance debut, and I got to play on one song on the debut album by Plum.

BAB: When did you decide to go with the Poets full time?

Miguel: Last year, at AtlantaFest. I was playing with the Poets and also with Sarah Jahn. By that time, the Poets had gotten Kevin on board, and it just felt right—the music, the ministry, the vision we all had. And that's when I called Danny and said, "Man, I'm in the Poets to stay."

BAB: OK, "New Guy." It's your turn. How did you get hooked up with Smalltown Poets?

Kevin: I started playing with the



guys in May of 1996. I met Danny and Michael while they were still Villanelle, in November of '95. But I figured it wouldn't work out for me to join the group at that time, because I was still in school. I was going to Belmont University. I saw Michael at GMA in April of last year, and kind of said "Hey, remember me?" Not long after that, he and Danny let me know they were still looking for a guitarist.

BAB: So are these guys mentoring you, teaching you what it's like to be a rock star?

Miguel: [interrupting Kevin] Actually, it was so funny. One of the long trips we did with Kevin was to Florida. We were staying in St. Augustine, hanging out at the beach. And Kevin's got his camcorder. And I hear him, walking around outside our bus, filming people on the beach, saying "This is the life of a rock star." [Everyone laughs]

BAB: How did you come up with Smalltown Poets for a name?

Michael: Danny and I were driving up to Gospel Music Week in Nashville last year, and listening to the *Braveheart* soundtrack CD. We had been racking our brains for months, searching for names. We'd be embarrassed to tell you what some of them were. In the liner notes, there was a quote from Mel Gibson about the story behind the movie, where he mentioned the Scotsmen who "fought like warrior poets." We thought that had a great ring to it, but there's no way "Warrior Poets" would be a good name for a band. It didn't take us long to link Smalltown and Poets together, since that's where our roots are. We got an overwhelming response from the band and management, because people that knew us knew that the name exactly summed up what we were about. It keeps us accountable,

because we remember where we come from, the roots of how we grew up in the church and were ministered to by Christian music.

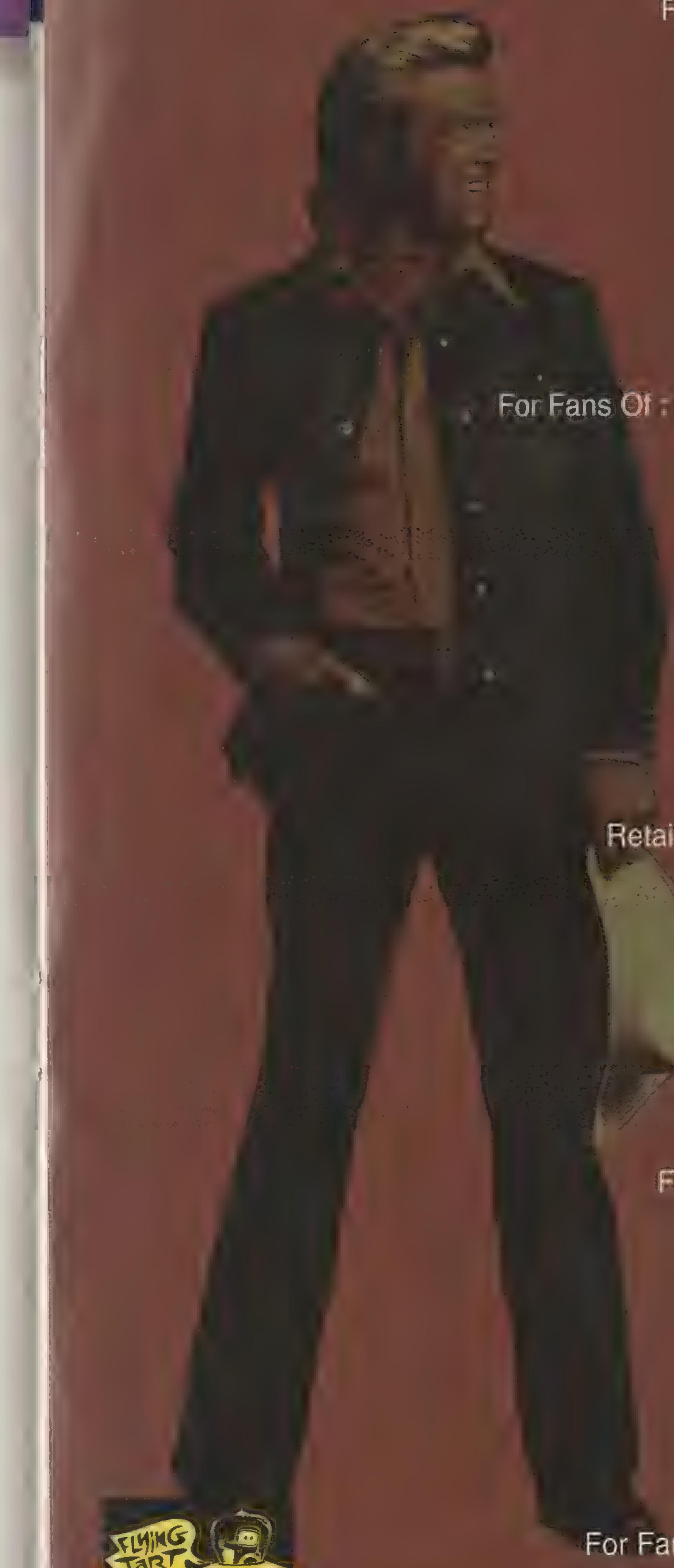
Danny: It wasn't just a matter of breaking up Villanelle and retiring the name. We completely started from scratch. New songs, a new style that was more in the modern rock vein that we'd been wanting to play, a new outlook, some new players. But more than anything else, a new commitment to excellence. God really laid it on our hearts that He wanted us to take our musical ministry and career to the next level. We feel like this band is going to touch a much larger audience.

BAB: It was a pretty quick trip from the demo stage to the Poets being signed, wasn't it?

Danny: Yeah. In May, we had the band line up all together, we had chosen the name, and said "Let's start shopping the demo." By the end of the summer, we were already talking with several record companies. After much prayer, we felt good about signing with Ardent/ForeFront. By October, we were in the studio with John Hampton as producer, which was an incredible blessing. Then this week—March 25—the album hit the stores. That's pretty much a thumb nail review of the past six months.

BAB: In a sense you guys are "new artists," and in a sense, you're not. Do you think Smalltown Poets benefit from being looked at from a fresh perspective? Do you look at being grouped in with young artists as a competition, or do you just figure "We do what we do?"

Michael: I think competition is great. It's what makes people excellent. It's what makes you go the extra mile, if you feel



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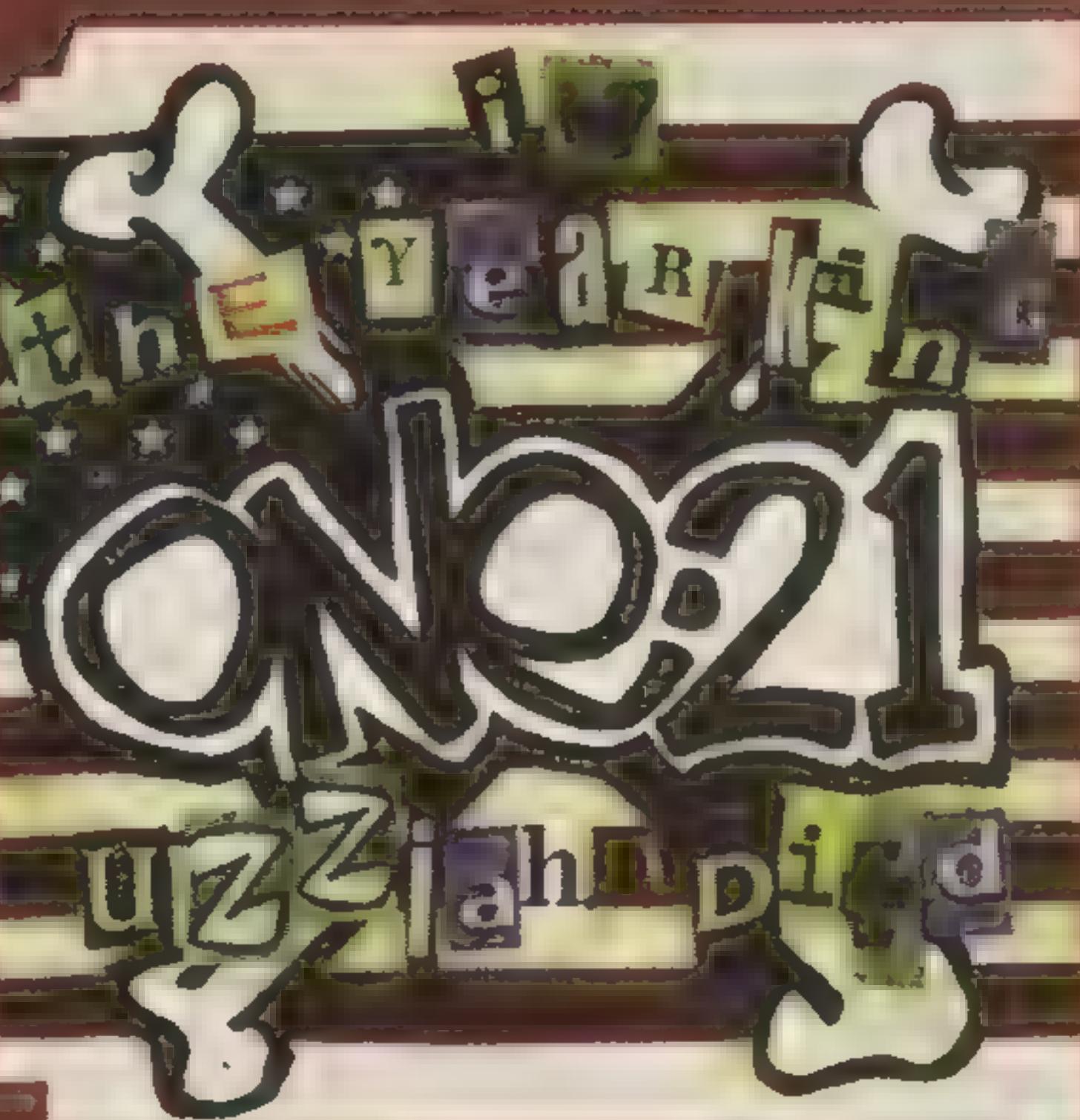
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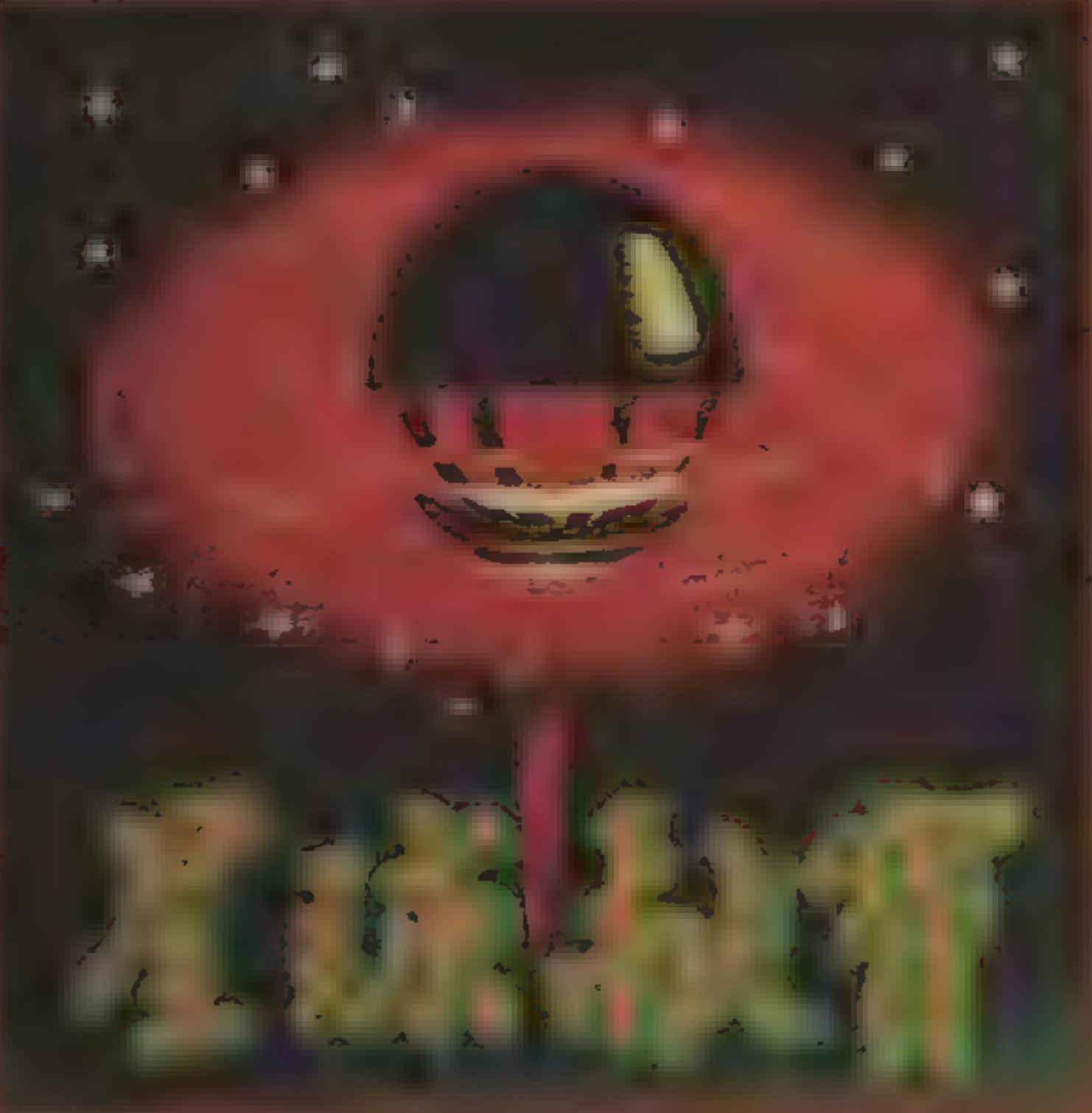
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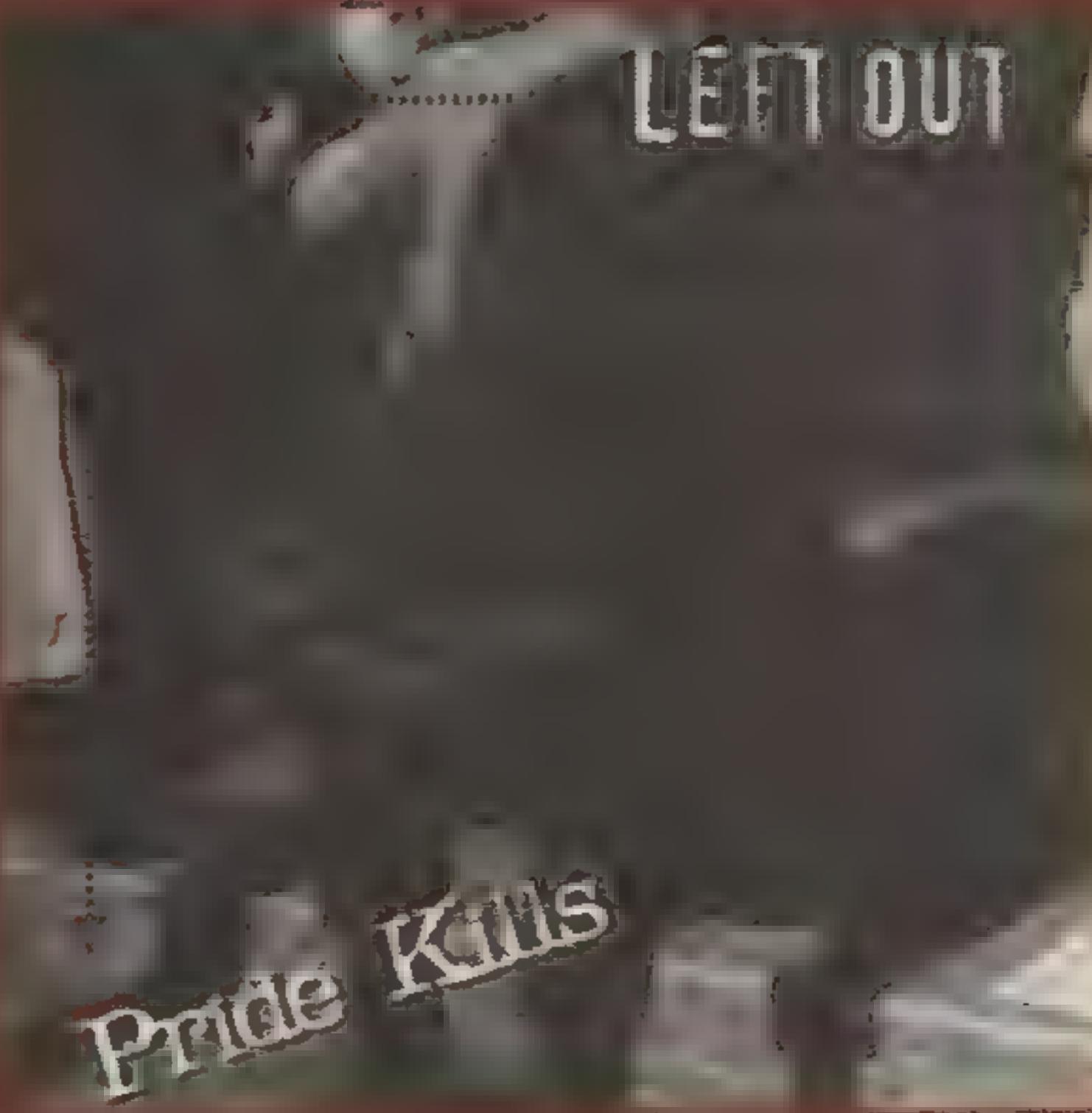
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like there's competition for shelf space, airplay, etc. Beyond that, we do have enough of the artistic mind set that we're confident that we're doing what we want to do, what God would have us do.

BAB: What's the course that you want to take with Smalltown that's different from your previous bands?

Michael: Well, we figured we ought to have a motto, with some initials. So we came up with "TWD," which stands for "Total World Domination." We jokingly say that if a youth pastor asks us what the initials stand for, we'll tell him it's "Total World Discipleship." We really believe that God is a big God. We've come to a point in our lives and with our dreams and our career that we don't want to limit God at all. He's given us a vision and opened our eyes to so many things that we never would have imagined. I grew up in a small church without a very big or active youth group. So I was discipled, in a lot of ways, through Christian music. We want to take advantage of the fact that God has given us this larger platform, and take it as far as He will allow. Obedience is at the core of everything we do.

BAB: You have the opportunity to play a lot of secular venues as well as Christian concerts, yet you don't change your presentation from place to place. Is that just a product of letting the songs speak for themselves?

Danny: The songs are pretty forthright and gut-level honest, and we do have some thought we share between songs, to make the picture a little more clear or to add a little seasoning to the program. But the music is just an extension of who we are and what we're going through.

Michael: We've really tried to be song-oriented. We all discuss where we feel each song needs to go and what it needs to communicate and how best to make the music work with the lyrics. Music is powerful; people listen to music, they want to know if you have something to say. We've tried to make those ideas clear and creative in our songs. Our goal, whenever we leave a place, is that we want the audience to feel loved. We want them to know that our relationship with God is the most important thing in our lives. We want them to see that not only from how we respond to them as a band, but the way we interact with each other on stage.

switchfoot

By Jeff Elbel

Every once in a while, a new artist comes along and really surprises you. It's especially nice to hear a band and get the feeling that they've got a good thing going, and that they're just getting started.

re:think's Switchfoot is such a band. Their debut release, *The Legend of Chin*, reveals many elements of a classic group in the making: great songs which maintain the band's identity, while showcasing a variety of styles, strong band interplay, lyrical depth, and a lead vocalist who sings with confidence and character.

They're young, too, so there's plenty of time for exploration of potential.

Songwriter/vocalist Jonathan Foreman and drummer Chad Butler are currently studying at the University of California at San Diego (economics, and history of science, respectively), while bassist Tim Foreman is finishing his last year at San Deugilo High School, near the band members' Carlsbad, Calif., home.

I caught up with the guys at the beginning of their spring break, just before

they would head to Hollywood for their first video shoot. The music industry machine seems to have taken the members of Switchfoot by surprise, but don't expect to hear them complaining. The band expresses feelings of excitement and gratitude, as they look forward to a new career.

During the interview, the first order of business is to try to describe the band's sound, for the benefit of readers who have never heard of Switchfoot. Seminal groups like XTC and Sugar are mentioned, alongside newcomers like Everclear and Bloomsday, as those that come to mind when listening to the more rock-oriented tracks on the album. However, the band collectively admits to never having heard of most of these bands.

The trio instead claims a heritage tied to inventive classic pop/rock bands such as The Police, and songwriters like Stevie Wonder. Furthermore, much of the material on *The Legend of Chin* is linked to the ongoing acoustic revival, and groups like Dave Matthews band.

Having outlined the sound, conver-



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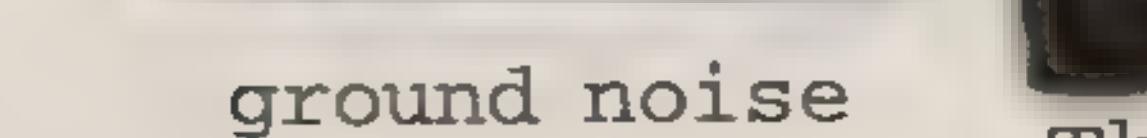
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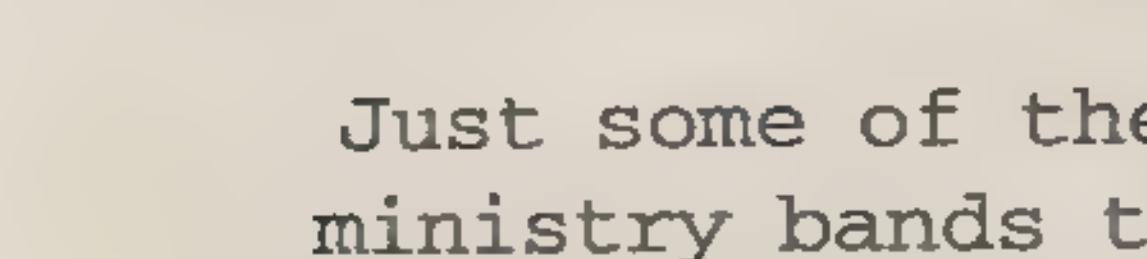
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sation turns toward the boys in the band, and their new record.

JE: Tell me about the band name. You all grew up in Southern California; "switchfoot" sounds like a surfing term.

Jonathan: We started looking for a new name back in December, about the same time that everything started moving along with Charlie [Peacock, owner of the rethink label]. We finally settled on Switchfoot about a month ago!

Tim: There's a term in surfing that's usually called "switch stance," actually. If you normally put your right foot forward, but you put your left foot forward instead, you're switching your stance.

Chad: The name sort of comes from that, but I prefer to think of it as taking a new perspective, or a new look at things. You're going to do something different.

JE: It's tough to find a name that can sum up what your music and philosophy are all about, and say it in one word.

Jonathan: We all wanted something that we could stand behind; something that sounded cool, but something that also meant something to us.

JE: Do you all surf?

Tim: Absolutely. Every day!

Jonathan: At least!

JE: It seems like you have a running inside joke about someone called Willis Chin. First, there's the name of the album. Then you have the photos and references to him in your CD artwork. There's also the song, "Ode to Chin." It has a line I really liked: "All you've been makes who you are now." Who has Willis Chin been, and who is he now?

Jonathan: He's a really good friend of ours.

Chad: He's the man!

Tim: The thing with Willis is an inside joke. It's been really fun for us for a long time. We even used to be named after Willis; we called the band "Chin Up." It's not so much a "joke," actually, but it is "inside," since we've been the only ones who know what it means.

Jonathan: I wrote a song for Willis, and he suggested we call it "Chin Up," because it was a "keep your chin up" type of song. We couldn't think of any other names for our band when we were first starting a



year ago, so we called our band that. Eventually, we switched the name of the song to "Ode to Chin." You can't have your band named after one of your songs!

JE: I'm failing to think of a good example, but I know that's been done. "Bad Company" would be a really old one. It seems like most bands that do that only have one record, though.

Jonathan: [laughs] Yeah, it's kind of a foreboding thing. So, we changed the name of the band, but we still have to give props to Willis Chin!

Tim: You've got to give a shout out to Willis!

Chad: He's about the only guy we know who can get demolished by a wave and come up smiling! He's always smiling. I think that's a good legacy. That's a good legend. He's always got his chin up.

JE: Your record shows a lot of dynamic variation; sometimes from song to song, and sometimes completely within a song like "Life and Love and Why." That one starts off fairly mellow, and ends up in full rocker mode. The dynamics help to underscore the emotion and the lyric, especially on that song, which is kind of like a prayer. It's an expression of searching, with "everyone hopeless and hoping for something to hope for."

Tim: In a sense, it is a prayer, because it's a very heartfelt lyric.

Jonathan: That lyric says: "Ask me for what am I living/ or what gives me strength/ that I'm willing to die for." A lot of

people in this day and age are searching for something to base their lives on. Something to live for. Something to hope for.

As Christians, we have something to hope for. Christ gives us something to die

for. We've got something that gives us strength. The simplicity of that is an awesome thing. The bottom line is, we have what the world is looking for.

JE: The song also seems to be about how people can blind themselves to those simple answers.

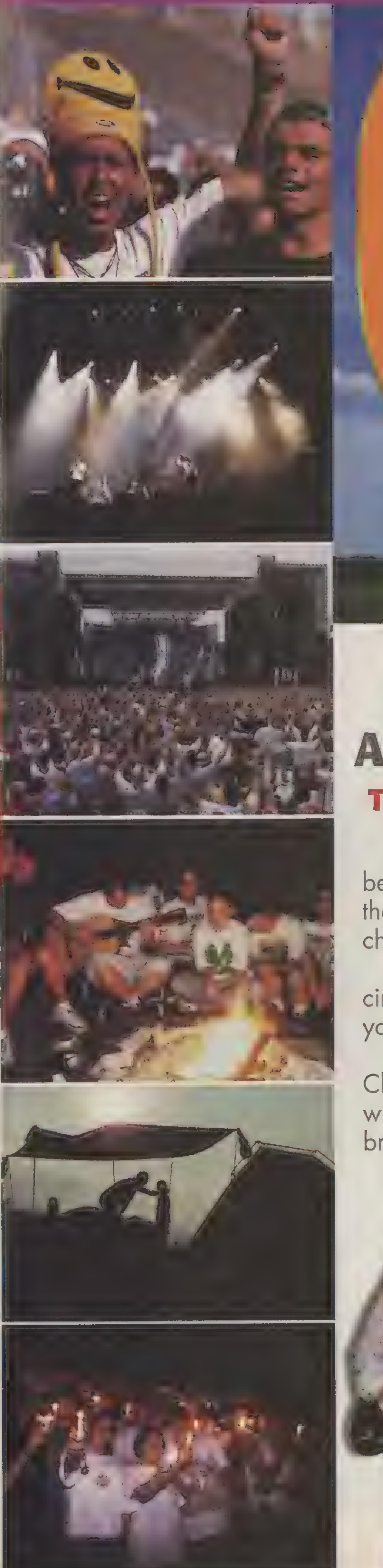
Jonathan: A lot of times, we don't really examine life, or think about things too deeply. It's easier to go through the motions day by day: get up, eat, work, sleep. When you really start thinking about life, why you're living it, and what's going on, that's a step in the right direction. It's good to ask those questions.

It's getting harder to do that, though. The world's getting faster. There are so many distractions. There's a billboard everywhere you look. There's always something to be done, something to watch, or something to hear. To actually stop and think is a difficult thing to do; it requires effort.

"Life and Love and Why" is kind of a melancholy look at things, trying to get someone to think about what's going on.

JE: The song that comes next on the album, "You," retains the mellow mood from beginning to end. That one's also like a prayer, with lines like "I find peace when I'm confused/I find hope when I'm let down/Not in me, in You." It's as if it's an answer to the previous song. Did you write the two songs with that in mind?

Jonathan: Those two songs together represent a theme that runs through a lot of our music. When placed with "Life and Love and Why," "You" is almost another part of that song. It's definitely an "answer to the question." 2



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Photographs by Elena Lopez
(photos indicated with * by Sonny T. Senser)

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Aug. 16

Grammatrain is playing in a town near you. Soon. And since *Flying* hammers the infamous "sophomore slump" into so many shards of hard rock fragments, you might want to start waiting in line for tickets. Soon.

"Grammatrain's vision was always pretty simple," says Dalton Roraback, the shaved-headed bass player and confessed Homer Simpson impersonator. "Tour, tour, tour. Grammatrain did over 200 shows last year. I consider that to be a full-time job, except that it doesn't pay the rent. Yet."

"We tour constantly," agrees Paul Roraback, the drummer/percussionist with the blonde mop of hair. "In fact, it's pretty much all we do."

"There's really no substitute for constant touring," says Pete Stewart, the dark-haired guitarist and vocalist. "We've definitely become tighter as a result of playing so stinking much this year."

The results can certainly be heard on *Flying*, which hits shelves in late June. Whereas their indie project and their national

course, I'm always more interested in what styles others hear in our music than what we say is there."

The "Grammatrain sound" has been identified with everything from Zeppelin to Pearl Jam to alternative. Pete says they have never been able to answer persistent pleas to identify their style. "We never really set out to be any particular genre," he says. "We just write the kind of music we like. I get bored with styles and categories. My favorite bands always break those barriers and categories. We enjoy bending genres together and not fit-

BY CHRIS WELL

When *Lonely House* was released, some thought it would launch the band to the top. And it certainly did win friends and gather award nominations by the boxcar. But the three agree it was only the beginning. *Lonely House* was a good start for us," Dalton says, "but I don't feel that it was competitive with mainstream rock like our new album is."

"I think that was an excellent album for the point we were at," Pete says, "and we're still proud of it because it's genuine and real and raw and has energy. We learned a lot and grew a lot since then, though."

However, *Flying* may be the album that fulfills the original promise that fans saw. "*Flying* is the album I feel can take us into the mainstream," Dalton beams. "It's current, and shows our maturity in songwriting and lyrics."

"We've definitely always wanted to head there in some capacity," Pete says, "but we've always known it's only gonna happen if it happens. There are so many bands trying to break in the mainstream, we're content to do what we do and let

G R A M M A T R A I N

debut *Lonely House* made an impression on rock fans and critics alike, there were lingering doubts about the band's ability to control their influences. With *Flying*, the reins have been pulled tight, the hard rock punching out of the speakers like a force of nature. Stewart's clear yelp cuts through the torrent, while the rhythm section of Roraback & Roraback give the proceedings an urgent cadence. The end result? This album rocks. Where *Lonely House* had moments that bobbed to the top, *Flying* is a consistent ride. The influences are still there, but they're under control.

"Our musical styles are mostly made up of what we listened to as we grew up," Dalton says, listing Rush, Led Zeppelin, Jimi Hendrix, R.E.M. and Pink Floyd. "These were some major influences for the three of us."

"We all listen to a variety of music," Pete agrees, "and it all shows up somewhere in our music. There's some psychedelic rock in our music, especially on the new record, '60s British rock, '70s metal (not the "transvestite-in-fishnet-stockings" kind, the Sabbath/Zeppelin kind), acoustic rock ... of

ting into just one category. Music is much more fun when it's not limited by a category."

Of course, those who call Grammatrain "grunge" are hardly doing the band a favor. Since the band is actually from Seattle, the national headquarters for grunge, they're probably more tired of the genre than many of us. After all, Pete points out, "grunge" is the same kind of term as "new wave" was in the 80's. "It's just a general observation of the sounds that were/are popular in music. The problem that arises whenever a new sound becomes a category is that bands emerge who are just trying to fit in to that particular style, when the bands who coined the style in the first place had no such aspirations. And forced music kills a musical style. We all certainly were and are influenced by bands like Nirvana and Soundgarden, but no more than we're influenced by The Beatles or Rush. I enjoy pushing the envelope of what a 'modern rock' band is supposed to be by having so much variety," he continues. "I get really bored with bands that have the same sound throughout their entire album. I wanted to stay away from that more than we did with *Lonely House*."

God take us where He wants to."

Since the band started out playing clubs, they have the experience of reaching out with their music. As Paul points out, they couldn't preach in clubs—or they would never be allowed to play. But that doesn't mean ministry can't happen. "I think it's a great way to share Christ with people on a personal level," he says. "We've had some great sharing with some of the people in the club scene, from bands to sound engineers."

And, of course, those who hear the songs are reached, as well. One of the hallmarks of Grammatrain is their intelligent approach to spiritual themes. They do not hide their light under a bushel basket, by any means. But—in the same way that the Lord spoke parables to the masses and then the disciples came up to Him afterwards and asked what He meant—the songs on *Flying* certainly bring up thoughtful discussions of how our Christian faith interacts with the real world.

"I spent a ton of time writing and re-writing lyrics on this and the last album," Pete says. "I'm very dissatisfied with unoriginal lyrics. I re-write them until I feel like I'm not



A DAILY JOURNAL

CURIOUS FOOLS: THE RECORDING OF READ

SUNDAY, JULY 23

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FIRST OFFICIAL DAY OF RECORDING. TROY HAD A BAD HEADACHE SO I TOOK HIM TO MAKE A WISE PURCHASE THAT WILL PROBABLY FIND CONSIDERABLE USE THROUGHOUT THE PROJECT ... A 200 COUNT BOTTLE OF ADVIL.

AT 3 P.M. AND ON TAKE 5, THE DRUM TRACK OF "CON CON" WAS FINISHED. DERRI DAUGHERTY STOPPED BY TO CHECK THINGS OUT.

5:15 P.M. STARTED TRACKING "SEVEN" (AT LEAST THAT'S WHAT IT'S CALLED NOW...ITS NAMED AFTER IT'S TIME SIGNATURE) CHRIS COLBERT STUCK HIS HEAD IN FOR AWHILE.

9:59 P.M. BEGAN TRACKING "MAGIC" AND IT ONLY TOOK ONE TAKE. SHANE WENT WITH A MORE LOOSE GROOVE FEEL, AND IT SOUNDS REALLY COOL. LAURIE DEATON (TROY'S WIFE) BROUGHT ENTENMANN'S FAT FREE CUPCAKES.

11:02 P.M. WE DECIDED TO MOVE TO A FRESH PIECE OF TAPE AND TRY ANOTHER PASS OF "MAGIC." IT DIDN'T WORK, SO, IT'S BACK TO FIXING THE BASS ON THE FIRST TAKE. ON THE SECOND VERSE THERE WAS A REALLY COOL MISTAKE. DONNIE BOTT'S (OUR ENGINEER) ACCIDENTALLY MISSED A PUNCH OUT ON THE BASS AND IT WOUND UP SOUNDING LIKE A REALLY FUNKY LICK. I GUESS WE'LL KEEP IT!

TUESDAY, JULY 25TH

12:15 P.M. STARTED WORK ON "ANGEL." SHANE DID A GREAT PASS ON THE FIRST SHOT. WE ARE GOING TO TRY ANOTHER PASS JUST FOR GRINS.

3:43 P.M. START WORK ON THE SONG TENTATIVELY TITLED "YOU'RE DANGEROUS." 5:26 P.M. TROY JUST ABSOLUTELY ROCKED AND GOT THE ENTIRE PART ON "YOU'RE DANGEROUS" IN ONE PASS. STEVE HINDALONG CAME BY TO CHECK THINGS OUT. HE HUNG OUT AND TALKED FOR A WHILE.

6:45 P.M. STARTED WORKING ON "TAKE ME BACK."

9:45 P.M. TOK PLAYED A BEAUTIFUL BASS PART. WE SAT AND DID AN OVERVIEW OF EVERYTHING RECORDED TO THIS POINT.

WEDNESDAY, JULY 26TH

12:45 P.M. BEGIN TRACKING "SLOW." TOK IS USING A GIBSON THUNDERBIRD THAT HAS A REAL GOOD TONE FOR THIS SONG. TROY IS DOING A PRETTY WHACKED SOLO.

4:48 P.M. BEGAN WORK ON "MESS" TAKE ONE WENT WELL.

5:13 P.M. TAKE FOUR IS REALLY CLOSE, BUT WE'RE GONNA TRY ANOTHER ON SOME FRESH TAPE.

9:44 P.M. AFTER TOTALLY CREATING AND RECREATING "STONE" WE ARE GETTING READY TO CUT IT AFTER A BREAK FOR SOME BEVERAGES.

12:52 A.M. WE STARTED WORKING ON A VERY COOL SONG TENTATIVELY TITLED "PULL." THERE ARE ONLY TWO SMALL LIGHTS ON IN THE ENTIRE STUDIO. THE MOOD IS THICK AND THE SONG GOES ON FOR ABOUT TEN MINUTES. THE BRIGHTEST THING IN THE STUDIO IS THE COMPUTER SCREEN.

1:57 A.M. TAKE SIX: AMAZING, BUT, WE SCREWED UP THE END, BUT, AFTER AN ABSOLUTELY BRILLIANT PUNCH IN BY DONNIE, THE TRACK WAS SAVED ... HAIL DONNIE!

10 TRACKS ALREADY. WE ARE WAY AHEAD OF SCHEDULE BECAUSE OF TODAY. GOD IS WATCHING.

THURSDAY, JULY 27TH

11:59 P.M. THE PRESIDENT AND THE DIRECTOR OF PUBLICITY FROM THE RECORD COMPANY CAME BY TO SEE HOW THINGS ARE GOING. WE SAT

DOWN AND PLAYED THE TRACKS SO FAR. WELL, IT WAS A PRETTY WEIRD EXPERIENCE. IT'S A TOUGH THING TO SIT THERE LISTENING THROUGH YOUR WORK IN ITS EARLIEST PHASE WITH THE PEOPLE WHO ARE GOING TO DECIDE WHETHER OR NOT IT'S GOING TO SELL AND TO WHOM IT'S GOING TO SELL.

4:09 P.M. START TO WORK. A SMALL NUGGET OF A GUITAR PART HAS SPURNED A NEW SONG CALLED "GOLD."

THE VICE PRESIDENT OF MARKETING IS HERE WITH A CAMERA. WE LOOK STUPID. HE ALSO BROUGHT BY A SAMPLE OF THE JEWEL BOX WE WANTED TO USE FOR THE PACKAGING. IT'S A DARK RED JEWEL BOX (GET IT? RED READ). THE ART WORK WOULD BE PRINTED LIKE THAT OLD GAME "PASSWORD." WHEN IT'S IN THE

JEWEL BOX YOU SEE ONE THING AND WHEN IT'S OUT OF THE JEWEL BOX YOU SEE SOMETHING ELSE.

11:18 P.M. WE START TO DEVELOP A SONG THAT WAS HIDDEN ON AN OLD WORK TAPE. IT MAY BE CALLED "HEAVEN."

FRIDAY JULY 28TH

5:30 P.M. WE START RECORDING A SONG CALLED "LOVE (IS BELIEVING)." WE WROTE IT SORT OF ON THE FLY IN SEVERAL, SMALL SPURTS THROUGHOUT THE DAY.

6:25 P.M. CHRIS COLBERT AND TESS WILEY STUCK THEIR PRETTY LITTLE HEADS IN TO SAY HI.

6:58 P.M. THE RHYTHM TRACKS ARE OFFICIALLY DONE. THE ALBUM FEELS COMFORTABLE AND ROUNDED. A BALANCE OF INTENSITY AND MOOD.

NOW BEGINS THE PROCESS OF CLEANING UP THE CUTTING ROOM, TEARING DOWN THE DRUMS AND BRINGING IN ALL THE AMPS FOR GUITAR OVERDUBS.

SATURDAY, JULY 29TH

2:12 P.M. THINGS ARE FINALLY MOVING. "CON CON" IS SOUNDING VERY FULL. IT'S PROBABLY THE SIX DIFFERENT GUITAR TRACKS THAT ARE HELPING.

4:22 P.M. AFTER LUNCH ... WE BEGAN WORKING ON "SEVEN" GUITAR OVERDUBS. "SEVEN" WAS A BIT OF A STRUGGLE, BUT THE RESULTS ARE GOOD.

9:30 P.M. WE BEGIN WORK ON "MAGIC." TROY'S USING AN OLD GIBSON SG. VERY GRITTY AND RAW SOUNDING.

SUNDAY, JULY 30TH

11:35 P.M. BEGAN TRACKING GUITARS FOR "ANGEL." TROY HAD A RELATIVELY EASY TIME OF IT. IT ONLY TOOK A COUPLE OF HOURS.

1:20 P.M. BEGIN SETTING UP FOR "YOU'RE DANGEROUS." BIG FAT SOUND. HEY ... WAS THAT JIMMY PAGE? HEY ... WAS THAT PRESUMPTUOUS? I DON'T KNOW.

1:42 P.M. DAN MICHAELS IS IN THE SHOWER. IS IT "JUST" ME, OR ARE THE GUYS FROM THE CHOIR SCOPING US OUT FOR SOME KIND OF HOSTILE TAKEOVER?

5:46 P.M. TROY FILLS "YOU'RE DANGEROUS" WITH ALL SORTS OF GUITAR PARTS RANGING FROM FAT DISTORTIONS TO AN ETHEREAL TWELVE-STRING.

8:45 P.M. TRACKING "SLOW." TROY DID A COOL SOLO SECTION, AND THEN I WENT IN AND

DID MY TYPICAL OUT OF CONTROL, COMPLETELY LOOSE, BUT LOUD RHYTHM TRACK.

MONDAY, JULY 31ST

12:39 P.M. TROY JUST BLEW THROUGH A KILLER SOLO ON "MESS" BUT HE STILL ISN'T SURE.

12:50 P.M. BEGIN SETTING UP FOR "STONE." EACH GUITAR PART STARTS WITH A QUICK OVERVIEW OF THE RHYTHM TRACKS AND A DISCUSSION AS TO WHAT SOUNDS WOULD WORK WHERE.

2:08 P.M. IT IS BECOMING HARDER AND HARDER TO DEFINE THIS ALBUM IN SIMPLE TERMS. I THINK THE CRITICS WILL HAVE A FIELD DAY, AS THEY DID ON THE LAST ALBUM, WITH TRYING TO PIN DOWN THE OVERALL SOUND. WE REALLY ARE TRYING TO PUT A FRESH TWIST ON EVERY SONG WE WRITE.

4:07 P.M. BEGAN WORK ON "GOLD." COOL SONG; VERY MOODY. AND JUST LIKE THAT, IT IS FINISHED. IT'S VERY QUIET NOW. AT ONE POINT SOMEBODY PUT IN SOME STUFF FROM THE LEGENDARY SAN FRANCISCO PSYCHEDELIC BAND MOBY GRAPE. TOK'S STEPFATHER, "FIGURE" (AS HE CALLS HIM) WAS THE FOUNDER OF THE BAND. TOK HASN'T SEEN HIM FOR AWHILE, THOUGH. HE WAS SAYING HOW COOL IT WOULD BE TO SEE HIM AGAIN. HE GAVE TOK HIS FIRST GUITAR AND TOLD HIM TO BE A ROCK STAR.

8:22 P.M. DONNIE PULLED UP THE TRACK FOR "LOVE (IS BELIEVING)." EVERYONE IS EXCITED, BECAUSE WE WEREN'T SURE AFTER WE WROTE AND RECORDED THE SONG (WHICH WAS DONE AT THE SAME TIME) WHETHER OR NOT IT WAS GOING TO WORK. BUT, EVERYBODY SEEMS TO LOVE IT.

10:04 P.M. EVERYONE IS GEARING UP FOR THE SOLO ON "PULL." EVERYTHING ELSE WAS RECORDED LIVE. THIS IS AN EXTREMELY EMOTIONAL SONG.

12:11 A.M. THAT'S IT. THE SOLO AT THE END OF "PULL" IS GORGEOUS. TROY REALLY HAD TO WORK IT, BUT, THE RESULTS ARE BEAUTIFUL.

1:03 A.M. I START VOCALS TOMORROW SO WE'LL PROBABLY START LATE TOMORROW.

TUESDAY, AUGUST 1ST

1:55 P.M. THE GOAL FOR THE DAY IS TO TRY AND GET SOME ACOUSTIC GUITARS DONE AND THEN WORK ON VOCALS THIS EVENING. I PREFER TO TRACK VOCALS AT NIGHT. BESIDES I HATE MORNINGS, AT LEAST WHAT I CONSIDER THE MORNING ... ANYWHERE FROM NOON TO FIVE.

6:48 P.M. I'M JUST ABOUT READY TO START DOING SOME VOCALS. EVERYONE IS

STUPID BECAUSE IT WILL START TO FEEL LIKE THERE IS SOME CLOSURE STARTING TO HAPPEN IN SOME OF THESE SONGS. ME ... I'M NERVOUS.

10 P.M. THE VOCALS FOR "LOVE (IS BELIEVING)" ARE FINISHED. MOST OF THE LEAD TRACK WAS DONE IN THREE TAKES, WITH BGV'S BEING DONE IN ABOUT THE SAME AMOUNT OF TIME.

10:45 P.M. START VOCALS ON "TAKE ME BACK."

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 2ND

3:54 P.M. AFTER A FAILED ATTEMPT TO GET ME TO SING BEFORE DARK, TROY IS BACK IN DOING ACOUSTICS ON "TAKE ME BACK."

6:49 P.M. I'VE BEEN OFF WORKING ON SOME LYRICS IN MY TRADITIONAL FAVORITE SPOT MY CAR. TO LOOK AT US YOU WOULD THINK THAT RECORDING AN ALBUM IS A LOT OF SITTING AROUND. WE TELL THE RECORD COMPANY WE ARE SPENDING A LOT OF TIME JUST FINDING THE RIGHT MOOD FOR WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE. AT ABOUT \$100 AN HOUR.

I RECORDED LEAD AND BACKGROUND VOCALS ON "MAGIC" AND "SLOW." LATER WE STARTED TO WORK ON "ANGEL."

THURSDAY, AUGUST 3

5:20 P.M. THE STRING PARTS SHANE HAS WRITTEN FOR THE END OF "SEVEN" ARE WONDERFUL. THEY SOUND VAGUELY REMINISCENT OF A JAMES BOND SOUNDTRACK. DURING THE REALLY SCARY PARTS WHERE YOU KNOW ESSENTIALLY WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN, BUT YOU'RE TENSE ANYWAY.

8:34 P.M. I FINALLY BROKE OUT OF LYRIC WRITING MODE, AND NOW I'M READY TO START CUTTING SOME VOCALS. I'M GOING TO START WITH "STONE," WHICH I JUST COMPLETELY REWRITED THIS AFTERNOON.

10:09 P.M. I RECORDED LEAD VOCAL ON "STONE."

12:34 A.M. "YOU'RE DANGEROUS" HAS PROVEN TO BE A VERY DIFFICULT SONG. IT IS TAKING A REAL CORPORATE EFFORT, WITH TROY, SHANE AND I ALL TRYING TO COME UP WITH A GOOD CHORUS MELODY.

FRIDAY, AUGUST 4TH

3:25 P.M. TROY IS REWORKING SOME GUITARS ON "LOVE (IS BELIEVING)" AND "SEVEN." I SPENT MOST OF THE DAY WORKING ON LYRICS FOR "CON CON" AND "PULL."

AT ONE POINT IN THE EVENING, AFTER I COMPLETED THE VOCALS TO "CON CON," EVERYBODY WAS SITTING IN THE LOUNGE. I PUT ON A SOUND EFFECTS CD AND TROY PLUGGED IN AN OLD RICKENBACKER BASS. SUDDENLY, SHANE STARTED PLAYING THE PIANO IN THE LOUNGE.

12:37 A.M. BEGAN WORK ON "HEAVEN." A

GRABBED A BROOM STICK AND A REFRIGERATOR SHELF AND STARTED MAKING KIND OF A WASHBOARD SOUND. SOMEBODY FIRED UP A DRUM MACHINE SOMEWHERE AND TOK STARTED PLAYING THE VIBES OVER IN THE CORNER. THUS, A

SATURDAY, AUGUST 5TH

2:59 P.M. PREPARATIONS ARE UNDER WAY FOR THE FINAL DAY OF TRACKING. WE'VE DECIDED TO DO A VERSION OF "MURDER IN MY HEART" FOR THE "JUDGE" BY MOBY GRAPE. THE ORIGINAL TRACK WAS RECORDED IN NOVEMBER 1967, SO WE'RE ONLY GOING TO USE EQUIPMENT MADE BEFORE THAT DATE. IT'S THE PERFECT COVER SONG FOR THE ALBUM.

THINGS WENT A LITTLE CRAZY TONIGHT. ONCE AGAIN A BUNCH OF PEOPLE SHOWED UP AND HUNG OUT. I MAINLY JUST WALKED AROUND FOR A WHILE. FINALLY, AFTER TROY RECUT A GUITAR ON "MESS," I QUICKLY DID THE VOCALS ON "ANGEL." NEXT IS "HEAVEN."

12:37 A.M. BEGAN WORK ON "HEAVEN." A

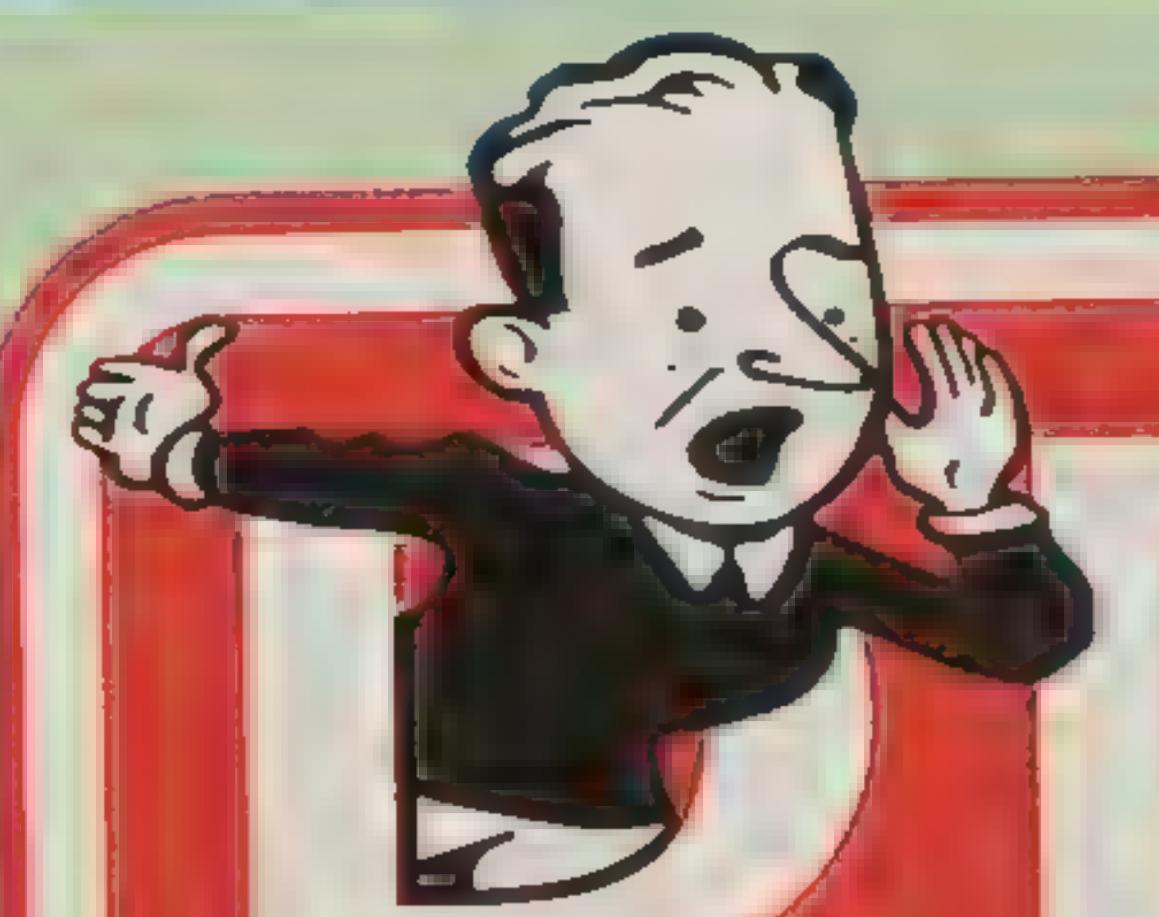
VERY SIMPLE TRACK THAT TOOK ONLY 30 MINUTES FROM LEAD TO BGV'S. IMMEDIATELY, WE STARTED TO PREPARE FOR "SEVEN."

3:25 P.M. THE RECORD IS FINALLY FINISHED. I DON'T KNOW WHAT PEOPLE ARE GOING TO THINK ABOUT IT. I SINCERELY HOPE PEOPLE WILL CONNECT WITH IT. I DON'T KNOW IF IT'S POSSIBLE, BUT I ALSO HOPE THAT PEOPLE WILL HEAR THAT THIS IS AN ALBUM MADE BY FOUR GUYS WHO LOVE WHAT THEY ARE DOING, WHO ARE CHALLENGED BY LIVING THIS LIFE, AND WANT TO SHARE IT THROUGH THEIR MUSIC.

WE HAVE A STRANGE AND BEAUTIFUL OCCUPATION ...

MURRAY

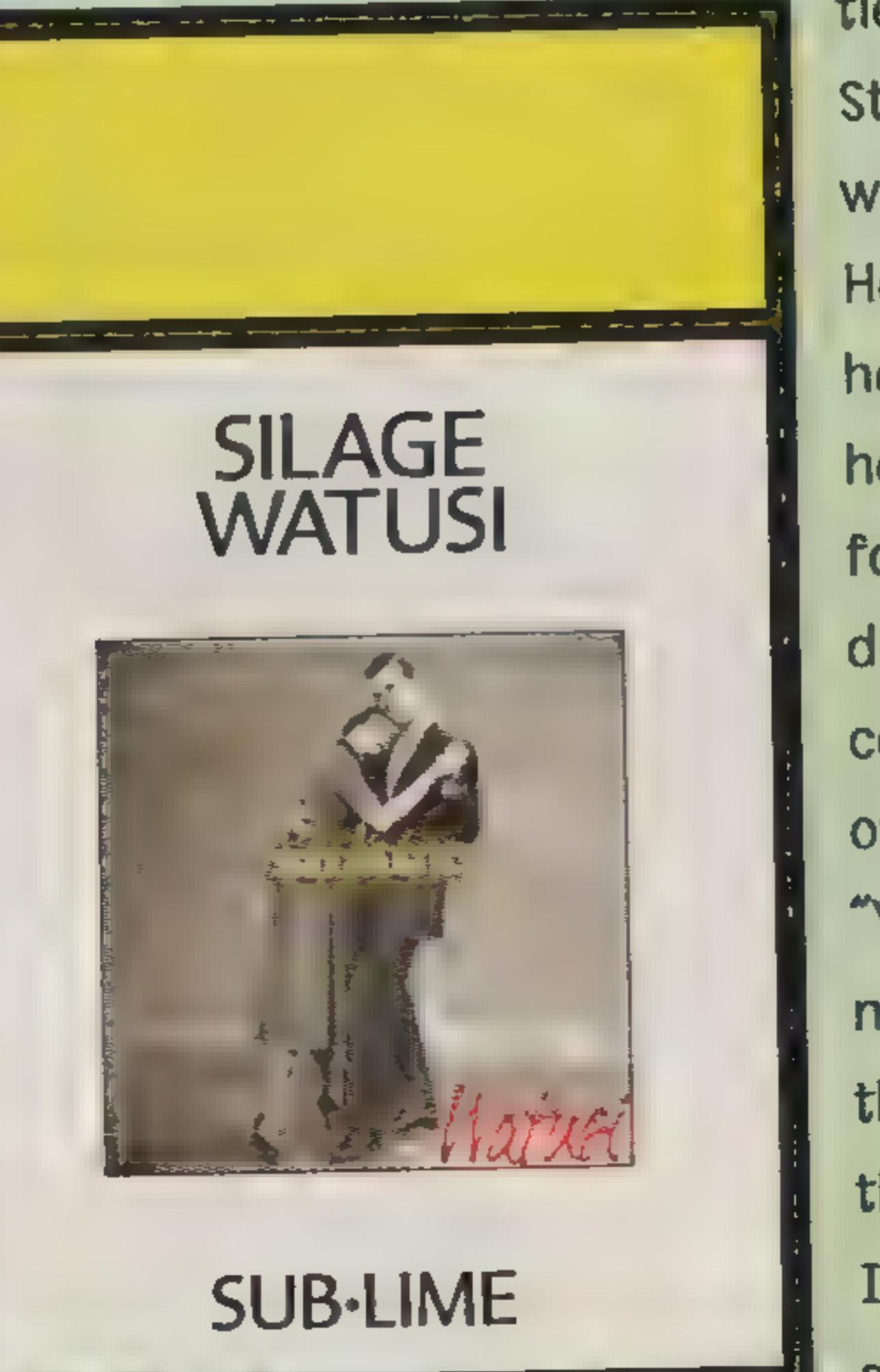
photograph by robert m. ascroft



REVIEWS



If you want to play to fans of more than one style of music, there are few options. You could make your music so bland it is insensitive to programmers in a variety of formats (Hootie). The other method is the "meat grinder" approach, bringing together a variety of influences into one single style (pop music for channel surfers). Examples would include the '70s smorgasbord of Poor Old Lu, the dyslexic stylings of Soul Coughing, or the alterna-hop of dc Talk. Several new and exciting bands are following this trend as well, including Plumb, Switchfoot and Reality Check. These artists are pushing hard against the walls of conformity. They just don't fit into one neat, little musical box.



SILAGE
WATUSI



SUB-LIME

for men"; "Giggle" and "Stumble" both grasp with the connection between sharing our faith and being a living witness).

No one jumps the fence more cleanly than Silage on their debut, *Watusi*. It's a little punk, a little ska, a little rap, a little Weezer, a little Presidents of the United States of America—and a whole lotta fun.

However, for all of the light-hearted bounce, there is depth here, as well. The topics include fame ("Drop Some Names" demonstrates how fleeting celebrity can be, while pointing out the eternal fame of Christ; "Watusi" brings up the hollowness of fame, breaking down the wall between the "star" and the fan) and evangelism ("Blue Igloo Cooler" makes a cool analogy out of being "fishers

There are also some very human moments here. "My Car Makes Me Sin" shows how easily our social interactions—and our circumstances—can sidetrack us from righteous behavior. "I Love the Radio" is a simple ode (it's difficult to tell if this is irony or wide-eyed awe). "Election Skank" expresses frustration at a political system inevitably tainted by a fallen world.

And, in case the music has been too unfettered and the lyrics too clever, the band hits home hard with "Jesus is My Best Friend." For some bands this sort of song might have been a dumbed-down tract, but the boys in Silage share their creed with genuine heart.

Closing with the Beach Boys classic "Be True to Your School" (a wholesome song which encourages community), the boys tip their collective hat to their geographical roots. It's a fitting end to a complete high school opus, which has everything you could ask for. It's a party in a box. Just don't expect a neat little musical box.

—Chris Well

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TOOTH
& NAIL
RECORDS

REVIEWS

With *Americana* it's probably fair to say Starflyer 59 has grown out of its shoegazer shoes. While there's nothing here to cause the average My Bloody Valentine fan to jump ship, there are plenty of new stylistic twists to make new fans out of those not already initiated into the vibe of this fine band.

Ringleader Jason Martin is joined by Wayne Everett (drums) and Eric Campuzano (bass), both formerly of Prayer Chain (and now in Lassie Foundation). The two help Martin bring his dreamy musical vision to life.

Americana opens with a huge guitar riff of a number called "The Voyager," which sounds just like a typical Starflyer dirge—until,

all of the sudden, a groovy organ thing kicks in; it's producer Gene Eugene adding a bit of his old school credentials to this post-punk

leader's recording, and creating something new.

With "Harmony," the group combines a sweet melody with twangy surf guitar licks, reminding listeners that, although Starflyer may sound hipper than a lot of what comes out of rainy old England, the members are physically from a part of the country which gave the world The Beach Boys and surf culture.

Just when you think Martin has

pulled every trick he knows out of his sleeve, along comes "You Think You're Radical," which sounds like some missing track from the Cowboy Junkies. Guitars slide in a slow motion waltz, the organ sounds as if it's out of a church service and Martin's vocals let out a mournful sigh.

Listening to *Americana* is a lot like our best dreams. Especially the ones we remember in the morning, but can't quite figure out just what they mean.

—Dan MacIntosh

STARFLYER 59 AMERICANA



TOOTH & NAIL

Today's top 40 radio stations are covered in a thick spread of female-fronted pop outfits performing what has become affectionately known as "alterna-pop." Enter Plumb, a new four-piece act performing top-quality, timely, and contagiously catchy hard-edged pop. Led by the breathtakingly passionate and powerful vocals of Tiffany Arbuckle, Plumb's debut album is definitely worth a listen.

While the direction of this album may sound a bit predictable, due to the quantity of this type of material being released, producers

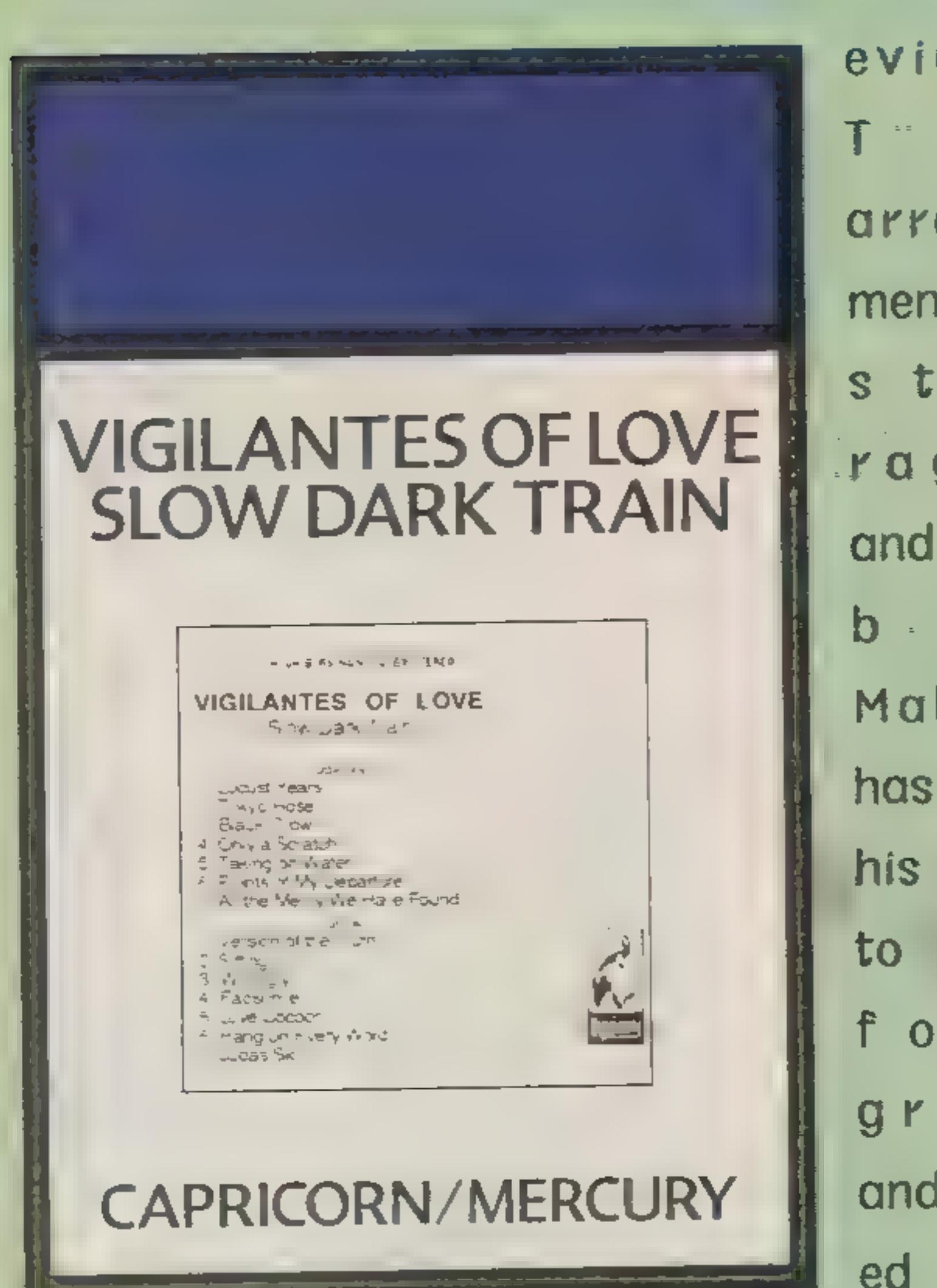
Dana Haseltine (Jars of Clay) and Matt Bronleewe have done a fine job in giving Plumb its own voice. Indeed, the production stands out.

The lyrical depth and poetry evident in the songwriting are another welcome facet. From start to finish, Arbuckle and company discuss verbal abuse, alcoholism, patience, God's interplanetary work, and even more, with precision and the experienced pen of a poet.

Songs like "Unforgivable" (with its intense musical delivery and vocal performance), "Who Am I" (with its trance-inducing chorus), and "Endure" (with its gentle keyboards and sugary-sweet melody and vocals), should fare extremely well on modern rock radio. With the right marketing and promotion, music this tasty should easily transcend the Christian market, as did Jars of Clay. Plumb is honest modern rock that will have your feet moving and your ears smiling.

—Chris Callaway

Slow Dark Train takes full advantage of Vol's penchant for relentless touring. For the last two years, singer/songwriter Bill Mallonee has also served as the band's sole guitar player. The energy and experience gained in that time is



CAPRICORN/MERCURY

evident. The arrangements are still ragged and rootsy, but Mallonee has moved his guitar to the foreground and created songs

that demand your attention as much for their visceral energy and volume as their fluid melodies and literate lyrics. Subtle electronic effects, as well as other occasional accoutrements (Hammond organ, harmonica, mellotron and strings) provide shadings that pull the band's sound in whole new directions without distracting the listener from the important thing: the song.

From the layered guitars and distorted bass of "Locust Years" to the haunting acoustic guitar and string section of "Judas Skin," every song on *Slow Dark Train* has, in effect, been voted on by the paying attendees of Vol shows. Long time fans will be glad to finally have legal copies of live favorites like "Tokyo Rose," "All the Mercy We Have Found" and "(Reasonable) Facsimile." The song "Love Cocoon" gets a face lift from the acoustic version found on *Jugular*, and Mallonee plays up every delicious innuendo in this Solomonic rumination of the joys of sex within the bonds of matrimony.

If this is the album to put Vol over the top—and it very well could be—success couldn't come from a finer record. *Slow Dark Train* easily stands among Vigilante's finest work. It is possessed of uncommon energy, soulful literacy and lyrical grace, an invigorating wind that blows strongly from the band to the audience. Catch this *Train* or be left standing at the station.

—Brad Caviness

[Ed. Note—CBA market distribution was expected by press time.]

There's a tendency in reviewing Christian music to latch onto a certain secular band within a given genre and then identify any and

all Christian bands that fall into that genre with that (e.g. insert Christian punk band which sounds just like Green Day). W-e-l-l, it doesn't always work that way.

Case in point: Detroit-based band The Insyderz has consistently been lumped into the same category with No Doubt since it first arrived on the scene last summer. With the release of its debut disc, *Motor City Ska*, the band moves as far away from those comparisons as possible. Its liberal use of horns, which is the trademark of ska (an idea No Doubt doesn't often embrace), gives The Insyderz a big band vibe to go with its off-kilter, left-of-center neo-punk, surf, rap-metal sound. Where No Doubt falls

squarely in the pop/rock category, The Insyderz moves easily between the aforementioned styles, often within the same song. What's more, and this can't be emphasized strongly enough, The Insyderz' lead singer Joe Yerke sounds nothing like No Doubt's Gwen Stefani.

The Insyderz may be too eclectic to appeal to a mass audience but it should be given points for its efforts to do just that. *Motor City Ska* stands alone as an outstanding album and an excellent first offering from this young band. It's not deep listening. The messages are simple. The band plays tight. And the music is fun.

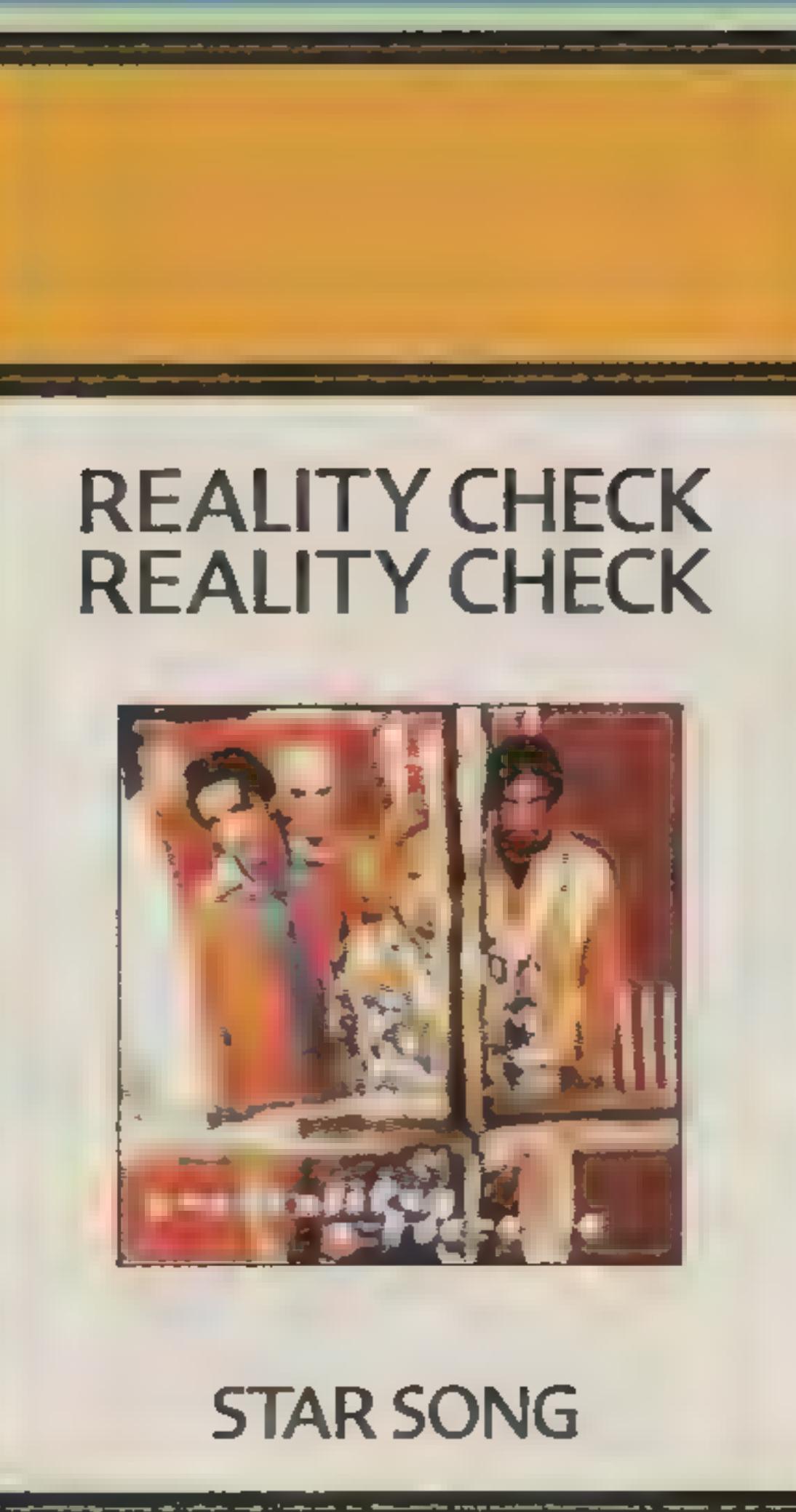
—David Bumgarner

Reality Check plays like a buffet for the ears, aimed at listeners who love dc Talk, Newsboys, Audio Adrenaline and even PFR. If you take elements of these bands and mix in a little 311, you get an idea of what Reality Check sounds like. The group raps à la dc Talk's *Free At Last* and mixes the guitar element of dc Talk's *Jesus Freak*, the fun grooves of Audio Adrenaline, and the Beatlesque harmony of PFR.

This may sound like they're wishy-washy and trying to please everyone, but that's

not it. The sound is more creative than a chameleon, like the buffet got mixed up in an earthquake—and, like chocolate and peanut butter, it tastes great.

Lyrically, the songs address our life as believers. "Carousel" paints the struggle with sin as a dizzying merry-go-round; "Speak to Me" and "Losing Myself" are prayers; "Plastic" and "Masquerade"



STAR SONG

look at how we need to be real with each other. The most fun tune is the short collection of samples over a music bed "Turn It Up," which has that "you gotta hear this one" quality. If you have a hankering for Christian music firmly planted in that '90s pop-groove-rap-grunge thing, don't stop payment on your Reality Check.

—Ed Rock

LET IT FLY

a live recording from the choir's free flying soul tour '96

includes enhanced cd rom with concert video/interviews/audio+pictorial discography/and the sled dog video

CIRCLE SLIDE

SLED DOG

YELLOW SKIES

AWAY WITH THE SWINE

CONSIDER

KISSES AND KILLERS

SENTIMENTAL SONG

SAD FACE

TEAR FOR TEAR

ABOUT LOVE

RESTORE MY SOUL

BEAUTIFUL SCANDALOUS NIGHT

LET IT FLY

REVIEWS

There is special sentimental value for me with *Let It Fly*, the new live record from The Choir. Although the different recordings come from several different concerts, the opening and closing remarks were made at a St. Louis show by my friend and mentor, Brian Quincy Newcomb (whom some will remember as the founding editor of *Harvest Rock Syndicate*, may it rest in peace).

Fortunately, there is much about this memento from the *Free Flying Soul* tour for

every fan of The Choir. With no retouching, no overdubbing, no attempts to bring the microphone any closer to the crowd noise, *Let It Fly* has

all of the sweet charm and distorted fury of a bootleg recording.

The picks reflect a good cross-section of their work—old and new songs, loud songs and romantic songs—all with the band's signature ambient noise filled out with help from guitarist Bill Campbell and percussionist Wayne Everett.

Through the years, The Choir has provided me with countless hours of entertainment, of thoughtful spiritual dialogue, and of heartfelt moments of humanity. *Let It Fly* is a wonderful keepsake to remember all those times they were able to bring it to me in person, as well.

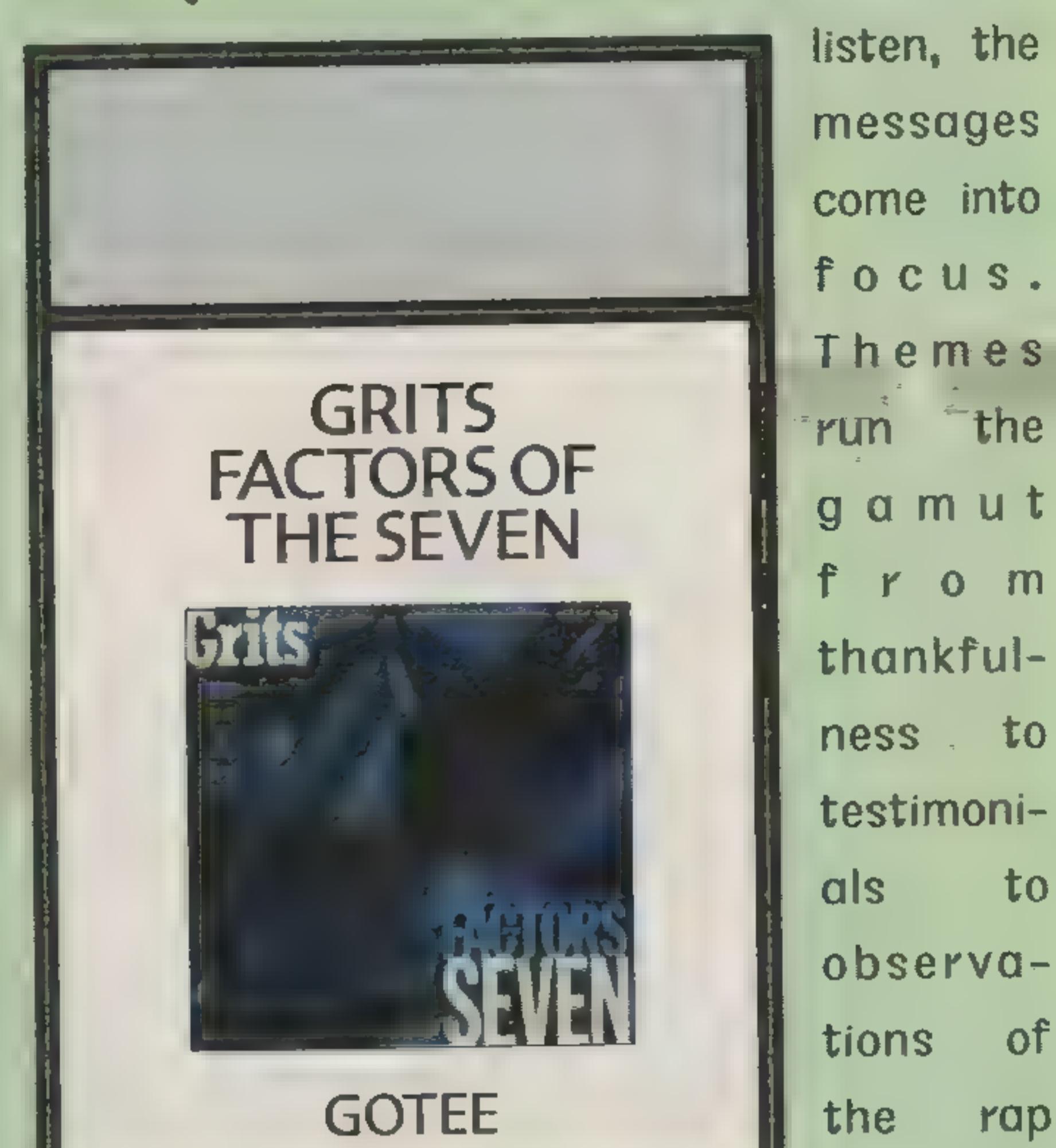
—Scott W. Christopher

Grits: they're not just for breakfast anymore. Teron Carter and Stacey Jones have whooped up a mess of southern-seasoned rap tunes with a little meat amidst the gravy.

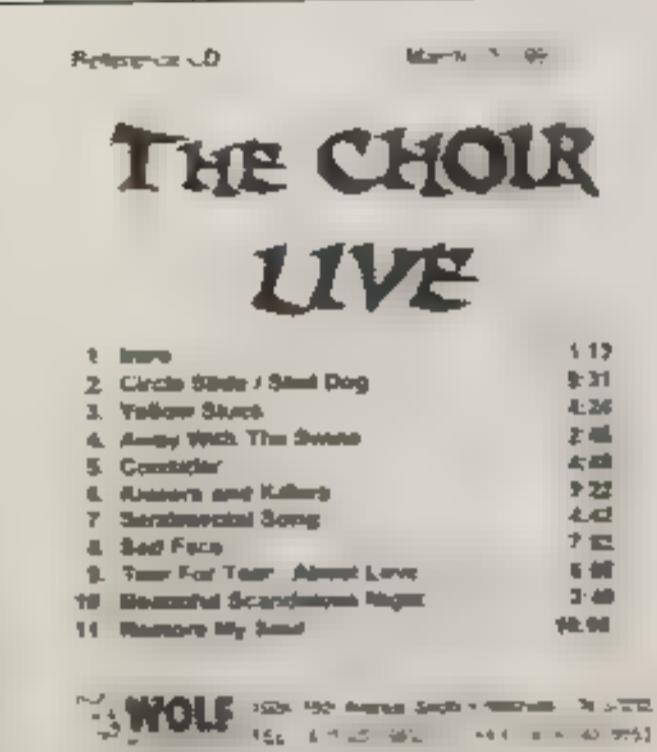
Factors of the Seven, the sophomore release from Nashville's Grits (Grammatical Revolutions in the Spirit), features a hefty dose of music—nearly 70 minutes of grooves and rhymes. The 15 songs and three inter-

ludes address issues relevant to the rap subculture, as well as to Christians in general.

On a casual first listen, many of the lyrics speed by unheard (or at least not understood by the uninitiated); with each additional



THE CHOIR LET IT FLY



TATTOO

all the sweet charm and distorted fury of a bootleg recording.

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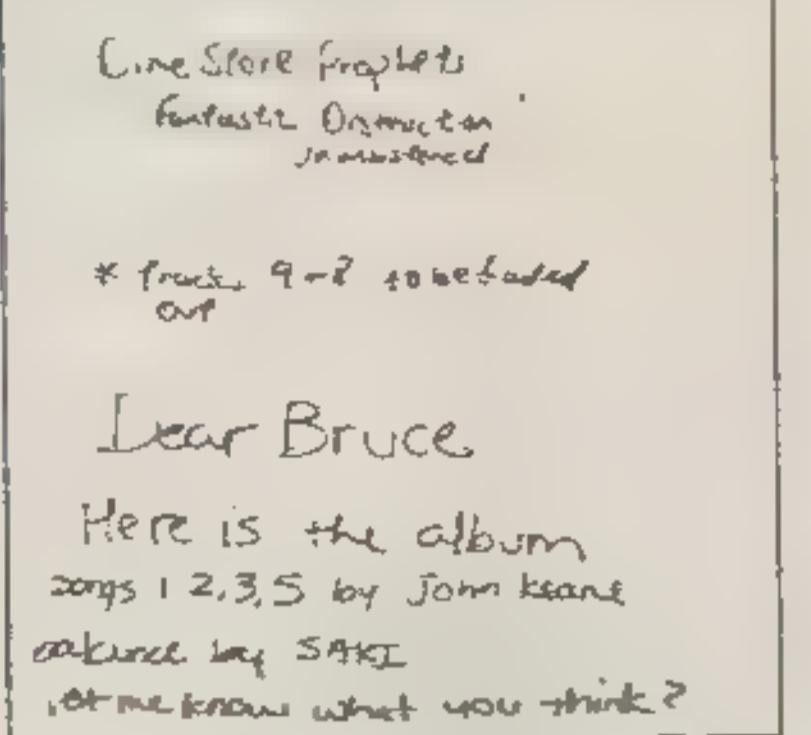
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—Ed Rock

The latest project from Dime Store Prophets, *Fantastic Distraction*, is much like a theatrical production. Set to a soundtrack of hearty, Midwestern rock 'n' roll akin to the likes of The Wallflowers and Counting Crows, *Fantastic Distraction* is populated by an assorted cast of characters. In "Break the Blue," one of them tries to send flares to get God's attention; in the title track, several of them resort to a variety of diversions to avoid the eternal questions; in "Boxing Shadows,"

Factors of the Seven, the sophomore release from Nashville's Grits (Grammatical Revolutions in the Spirit), features a hefty dose of music—nearly 70 minutes of grooves and rhymes. The 15 songs and three inter-

DIME STORE PROPHETS FANTASTIC DISTRACTION



SARA BELLUM

one character realizes the inevitability of owning up to the choices we make, including the bad ones; "Yeah, Sure OK, Monet" finds an

artist struggling with the frustration of artfully representing the world all around him; the "king of the tragic ones" is the sort who is only happy when he's miserable.

After setting up the players, The Prophets then wrap up the musical journey with hope, found in Christ. In the final track, "Heavy as it Goes," they point out that no weight of the world outweighs the love of Christ.

Fantastic Distraction brims over with love and heart: Musically, it is a roots rock feast that has more variety and emotion than the usually droll releases; thematically, the Prophets have found a way to communicate their faith through stories of pain and loss, which makes the Gospel more real and more urgent. It is a remarkable manifesto.

—CsW

As the 21st Century draws ever closer, we have become obsessed with putting art into compartments; as music is channelled through the different media outlets, it becomes more difficult to avoid the niche. So, it becomes problematic when a band like The

THE ALTERED YOURS TRULY



CURB

And while there are moments here and there that intersect with different shadings, throughout their debut, the members of The Altered flail away at your basic rock 'n' roll, with heart and distortion and the sort of wide-eyed lyrics that can get away with "if you find it's open/and you're really open/better find the open door."

The track "Low" brings the lofty philosophies of Ecclesiastes (literally) down to street level. "Ooh, Where Are You" (with great harmonies at the chorus) laments a friend who took a different path in life. "You Are All I Want" is a praise song for modern church campers.

The album closes with a sweet acoustic remake of "Yours Truly," complete with string accompaniment. Although it almost betrays their hand—it shows they have more in common with Journey than they would care to admit—it doesn't detract from the whole package. This is The Altered. And they're a rock band.

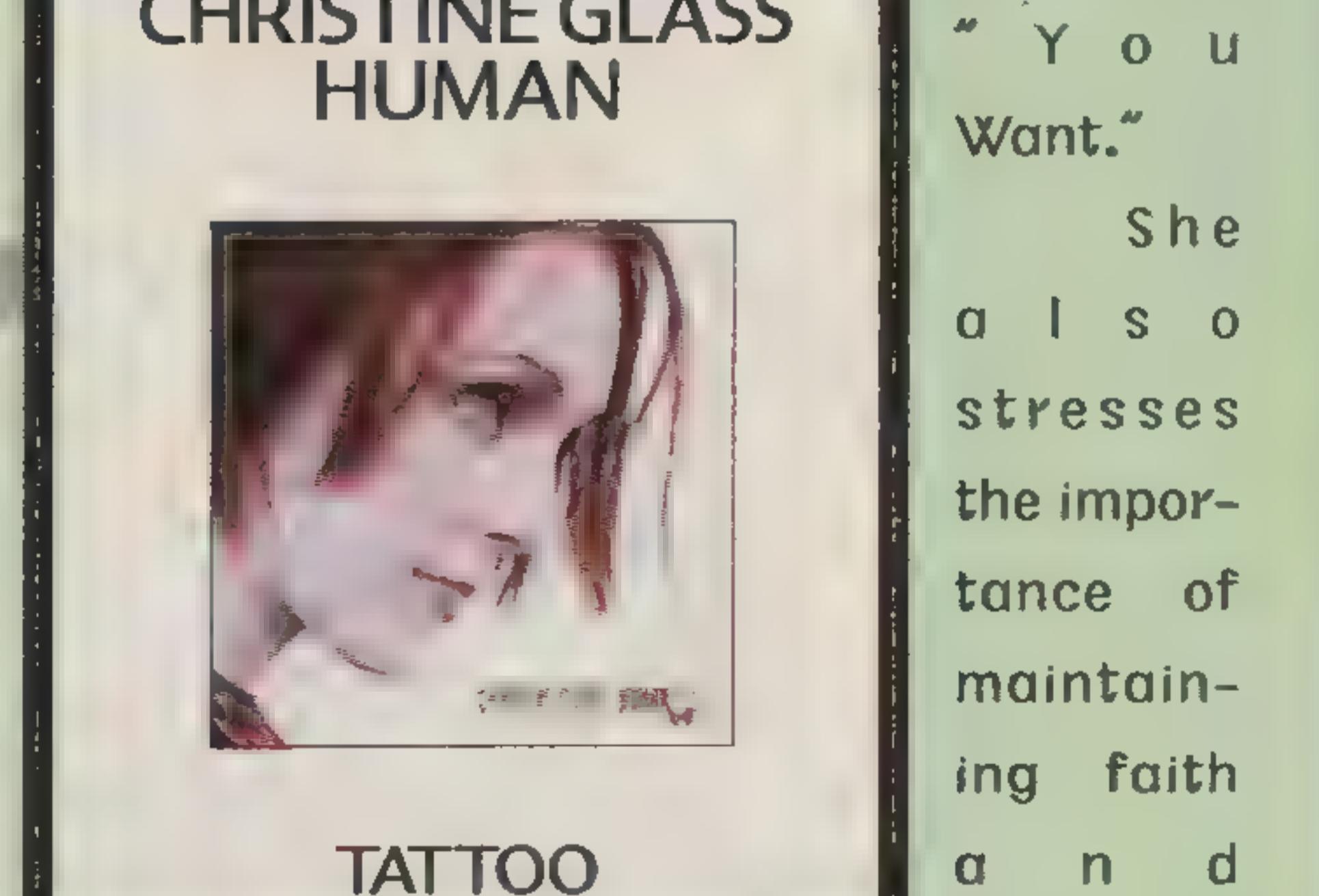
—CsW

"I am dripping with humanity," Christine Glass sings on her debut *Human*, "I am a mystery of creation." As the title suggests, the album is an exploration of the frailties of the flesh, with Glass's thoughts couched in a variety of adult alternative styles—from the cool and breathy "I Believe" to the vibrant pop of "Waves" to

the Ohio rock (Morella's Forest, Belly) of "You Want."

She also stresses the importance of maintaining faith and integrity

in a world that strives against you. In "I Believe," she sings, "I'm so very tired/ of being run down/ only because I'm a believer in God," but she sings it with weariness, not anger. It is a very reasonable position, and effectively emotional. There is resignation, as well, as in "Time Doesn't Heal All Wounds."



TATTOO

She sings, "God cannot always say yes to you/ It doesn't mean He doesn't care."

While much of this album is gloomy—in a philosophical sort of way—it is hardly one that ignores the hope of Christ. In "Shadows," Glass trusts that the Lord is watching her, even when she can't see Him. And in the song that closes the album, "When Worlds Collide," she agonizes

over the war between the spirit and the flesh.

As the Apostle Paul wrote, "the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak," she prays, "When my world shatters in two/ Capture me to you." Like life itself, *Human* is an expression of darks and lights, faith and doubt, all the while trusting that the Lord is always there, waiting to help us sort it out.

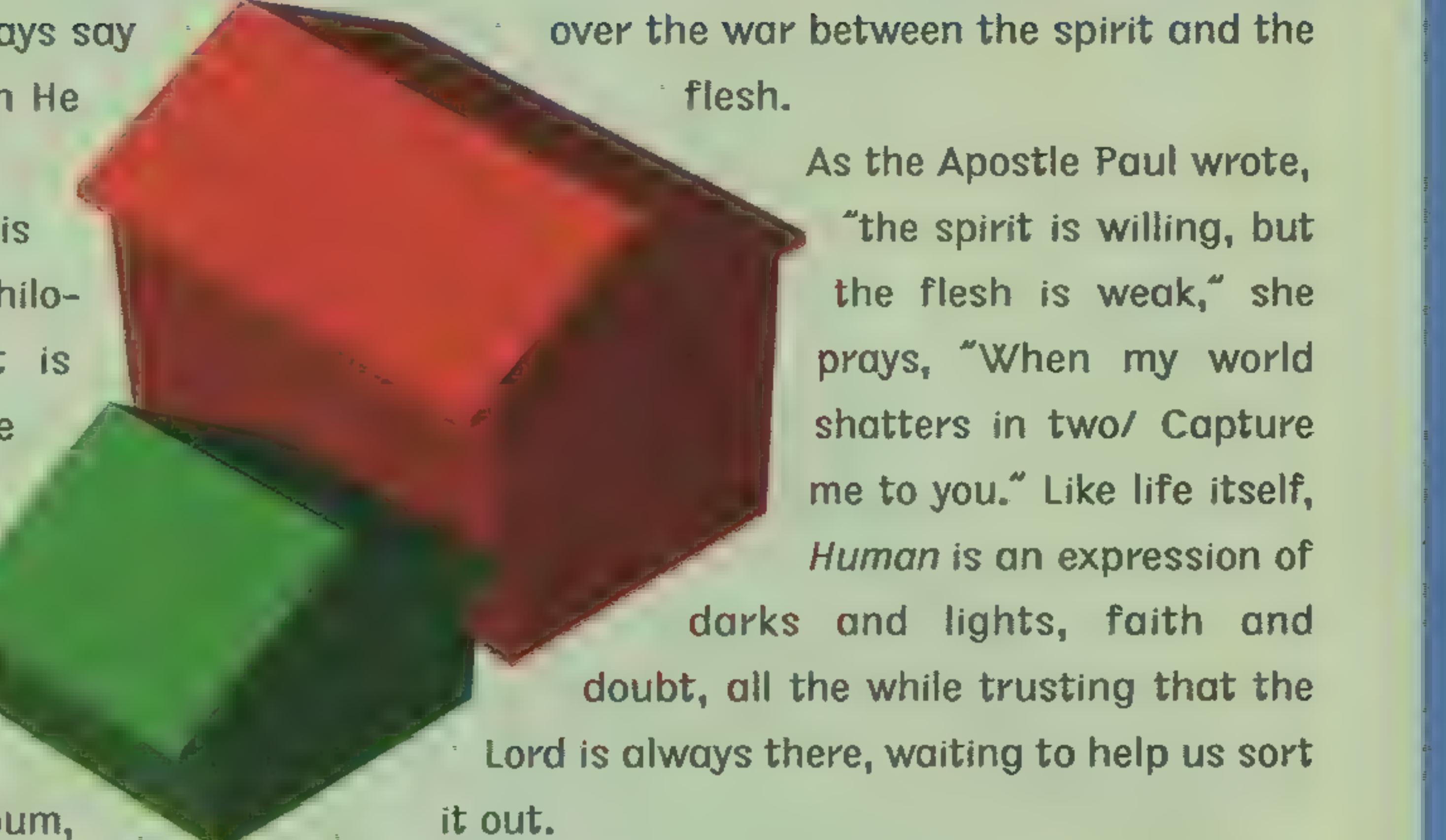
—CsW

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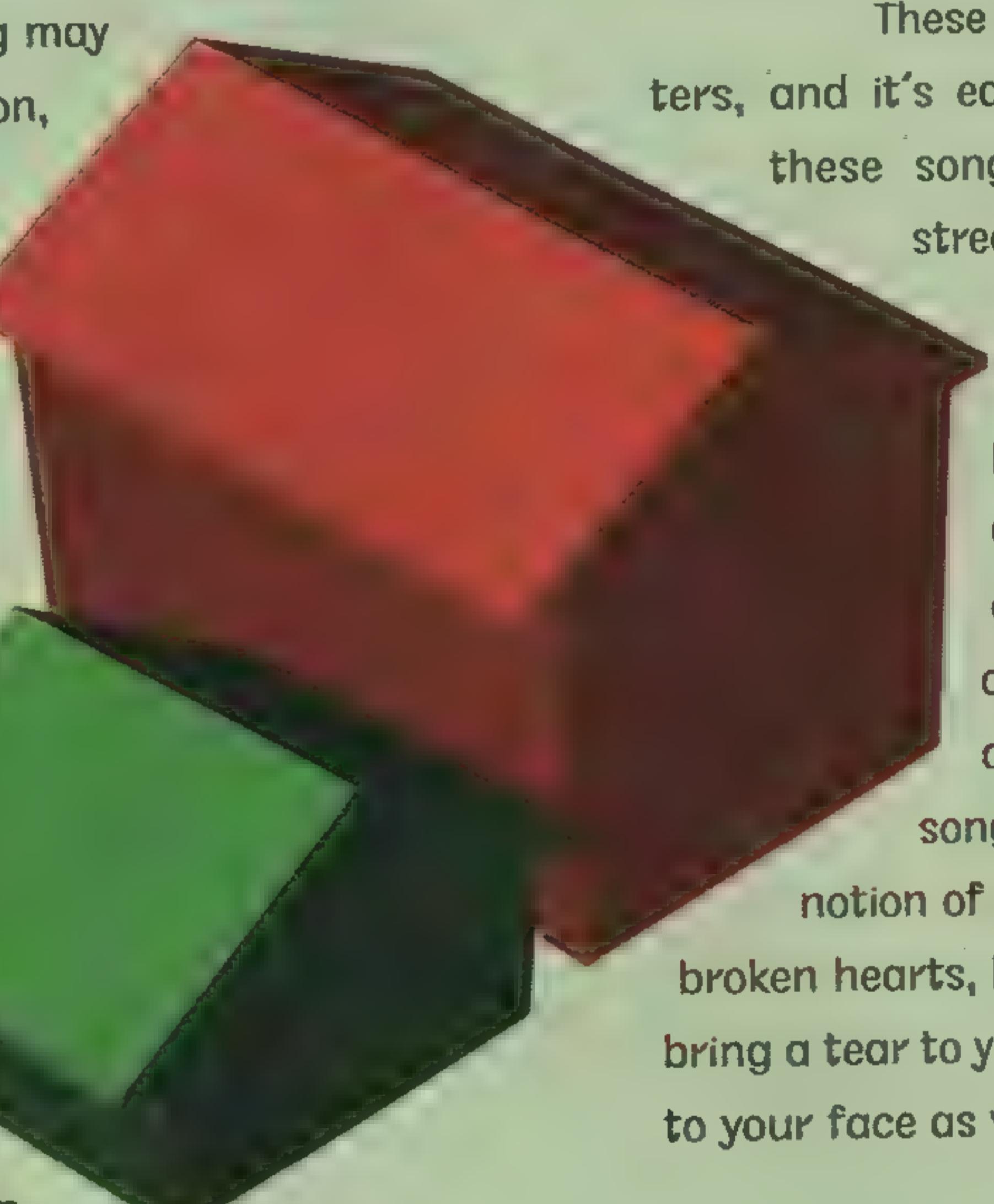


REVIEWS

About a year and a half ago, we ran a review of Curious Fools' sophomore release, *Read*. But in the wake of the record actually getting released, the Fools' label, *Via Records*, went belly up and the record has languished in the vault ever since. Now the band has signed a new deal that will give everyone a second chance to take a first listen to this recording.

Curious Fools' self-titled debut turned as many heads for its killer album artwork and lead singer Steve Murray's overt Bono influences as it did for the band's incisive songwriting and skillful musicianship. On *Read*, the band's sophomore project, the unique packaging may still be a distraction, but the U2 comparisons are reduced to almost nil and the Fools' songwriting has been honed even sharper. The polished atmospheric veneer of Curious Fools has been peeled back revealing an edgy guitar pop attack. This more direct approach, full of catchy choruses and memorable guitar hooks, makes *Read* more 'user friendly' and more experimental at the same time. The lyrics have more bite as well, more room for personal interpretation. Paradoxical, you say? Contradictory? If it wasn't so curious, it wouldn't be this interesting.

—Brad Caviness



Damien Jurado comes from the school known as "emo pop," a musical form that mixes the contrasting dynamics of grunge with free-form lyrics and improvised vocal melodies. His old band Coolidge was featured on the Tooth and Nail indie punk sampler

I'm Your Biggest Fan. For his solo debut record, however, Jurado trades in his punk roots to try on his "sensitive songwriter" hat for a record that borrows from folk, '60s pop, and a dash of lo-fi modern pop.

For example, the second track, "Angel of May," layers Hammond organ, mandolin, piano and a rhythm that I would swear was sampled from the game "Donkey Kong Country." "Space Age Mom" uses a surf arrangement and Beach Boys' vocals to underscore his quirky tale of the post-atomic nuclear family.

These songs are all about characters, and it's easy to cast the characters of these songs as residents of Jurado's street. In his tales, *Waters Ave. S.*

lies just around the corner from hope springs eternal. Many of the songs ("Wedding Cake," "Treasure of Gold," "Hell or Highwater," "Halo Friendly") are about love lost and unrequited. They are romantic, sad

songs that believe more in the notion of love, not only in spite of all the broken hearts, but because of them. They may bring a tear to your eye, but they'll bring a smile to your face as well.

—Brad Caviness

Ilan Aguirre is an artist. Best known for his band *Scattered Few*, his new group *Spy Glass Blue* features the same quirky alternative

—Brad Caviness

bent we've come to expect. Originally an indie project, *Shadows* is a collaboration with bassist River Tunnell and guitarist Kane Kelly. The album, which is finally finding national release, is a musical tapestry with many different elements woven together: If The Cure performed a David Bowie rock opera that was based on a demented Disney animated film ... well, you'd be approaching the ballpark. It's a haunting mix,

a chilling musical portrait of the confusion of life outside of Christ. The album opens with "Thin" and "Leaner," which points out how brittle a life of the flesh can be. From there,

Aguirre likens salvation to coming in out of the cold ("Lodger"), speaks to religious leaders who hide their own spiritual shortcomings ("Stygian") and uses Pauline language to question the listener about who could wield the power of God—allowing the listener to fill in the obvious answer for themselves. *Shadows* is an interactive journey which expects listeners to search the lyrics—and the Scriptures and their hearts—to fully come to a knowledge of Christ. The densely packed poetic imagery will be too thick a wall for some to penetrate—these lyrics require time and thought. However, as with all art where Christ is the central theme—it's always worth the work.

—CsW

Split Level is a trio which hails from Ireland. Although the band's history dates back nearly a decade, and it has had two previous best-selling releases in Europe, *global* is Split Level's international debut. As it's an energetic amalgamation of the many influences which the group has soaked up over the years, "modern rock" would seem much too narrow a description of Split Level's sound. The group artfully mixes '80s New Wave (such as Elvis Costello and Graham Parker), power pop (like The Plimsouls or Undertones) and '90s roots rock (Counting Crows, Tom Petty). Much credit should go to producer Rick Elias, who is a contemporary of Split

Level in both age and influences. The band clearly had a great time in the studio, under Elias' sharp guidance.

Since there's not a pervasive Christian music "scene" in the U.K., that means bands based there can often take greater liberties

with their lyrics (no airplay equals no advertisers to offend, I suppose).

Split Level is not brash, but rather, thought-provoking.

"Shrinking

Brain"

addresses the small-mindedness which proliferates "the troubles" in Northern Ireland; "If I Should Leave" reminds us not to try and escape God's watchful eye "by the back door"; "Twister"

shows how quickly and easily the truth can be distorted, while "Emily"

is a pointed exposé of the underground abortion movement in Great Britain. Brimming with both spunk and compassion, *global* is a welcome calling card from a terrific band.

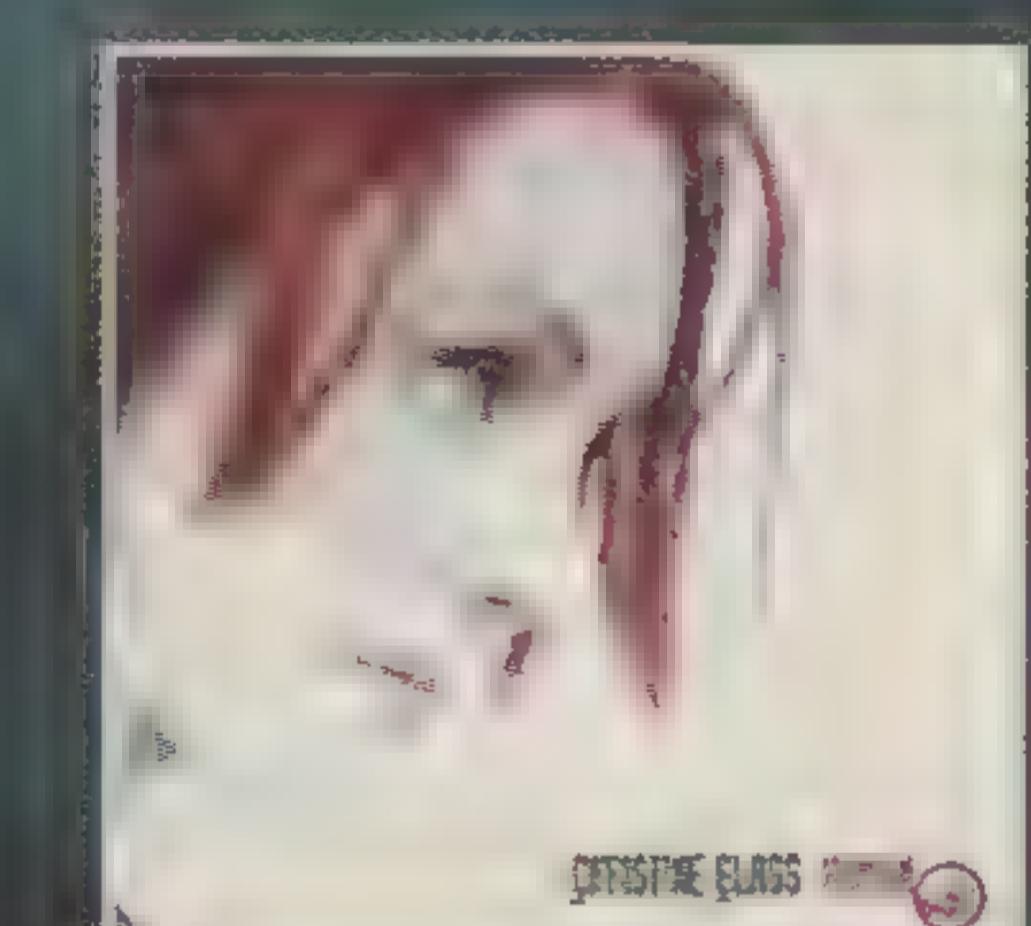
—Bruce A. Brown

OK, boys and girls, it's time once again to pull out those bell-bottoms and cool velvet blacklight posters and switch on the lava lamp—Soulfood 76 is back, and in the groove. From the album opener "Time," a dreamy Zeppelin-esque ballad, to the acoustic-turned-funk demo "Praise God" which closes the record, *Velour (retrospective)* finds the gents of Soulfood zipping to all

should give a spin to *Velour (retrospective)*. It's anti-trendy.

—Scott W. Christopher

SOULFOOD 76 VELOUR (RETROSPECTIVE)



CHRISTINE GLASS HUMAN

featuring the single "I Believe" available now from tattoo



REVIEWS

With a new lead singer and chief lyricist (not to mention new drummer), you'd expect big changes on Spooky Tuesday's sophomore release, *Dissonance*. Well, there are differences, just not the obvious ones.

Vocally, for instance, there's not much change (the new singer and the one he replaced sound and look very similar). Instead, the band's

stylistic direction is where you would find a difference. On its debut, Spooky Tuesday's style was disjointed, ranging from predictable, aggressive modern rock to roots rock. While the band retained some of the latter elements, the bulk of this project is focused toward a more groove-oriented sound. And, for good measure, there are novel appearances by Latin-based influences on songs such as "Agua" and "Cry Me To Sleep."

However, the band's strongest suit is its songwriting, with lyrical gems such as "Suicide," "Salvation" (a unique look at the crucifixion), and "The Smoking Song" (a sarcastic jab at habitual vices).

The production values of *Dissonance* could stand to be better. The album's opening cut, "Personal Institution," is a prime example of how a good song ended up sounding mediocre. But, overall, Spooky Tuesday shows marked growth and *Dissonance* has enough charm to win over a few more unsuspecting ears.

—Chad Bonham

SPOOKY TUESDAY DISSONANCE



INNOCENT MEDIA

Brothers Dale and Troy Thompson have pounded away in Bride for more than a decade. From their early

days as a metal band with screeching vocals and hard-edged music, Bride has changed and also matured over the years, as backing members

came and went. Eight albums later, Bride arrives in style with *The Jesus Experience*, a lusciously loud recording chock-full of modern hard rock that relies on catchy songwriting dipped in the spicy dressing of classic rock influences.

Producers John and Dino Elefante know that rawness rules in modern hard rock, and put little polish on the album.

The Jesus Experience sounds as if Bride went into a big, open room that had great acoustics, cranked their Marshalls to ten, and hit "record."

This raw, expertly-produced recording takes the listener through a captivating array of distortion-drenched tunes, each dripping with intensity and seriousness about the Gospel. Whether it's "The Worm," with its stripped-down verse and irresistible hair-raising chorus, the Led Zeppelin-meets-Lenny Kravitz feel of "Til the End of the World" or the swirling

melody of "One Race," this is one experience which deserves a serious listen.

—Chris Callaway

BRIDE THE JESUS EXPERIENCE



ORGANIC

DANIELSON FAMILY TELL ANOTHER JOKE AT THE OL' CHOPPIN' BLOCK



TOOTH & NAIL

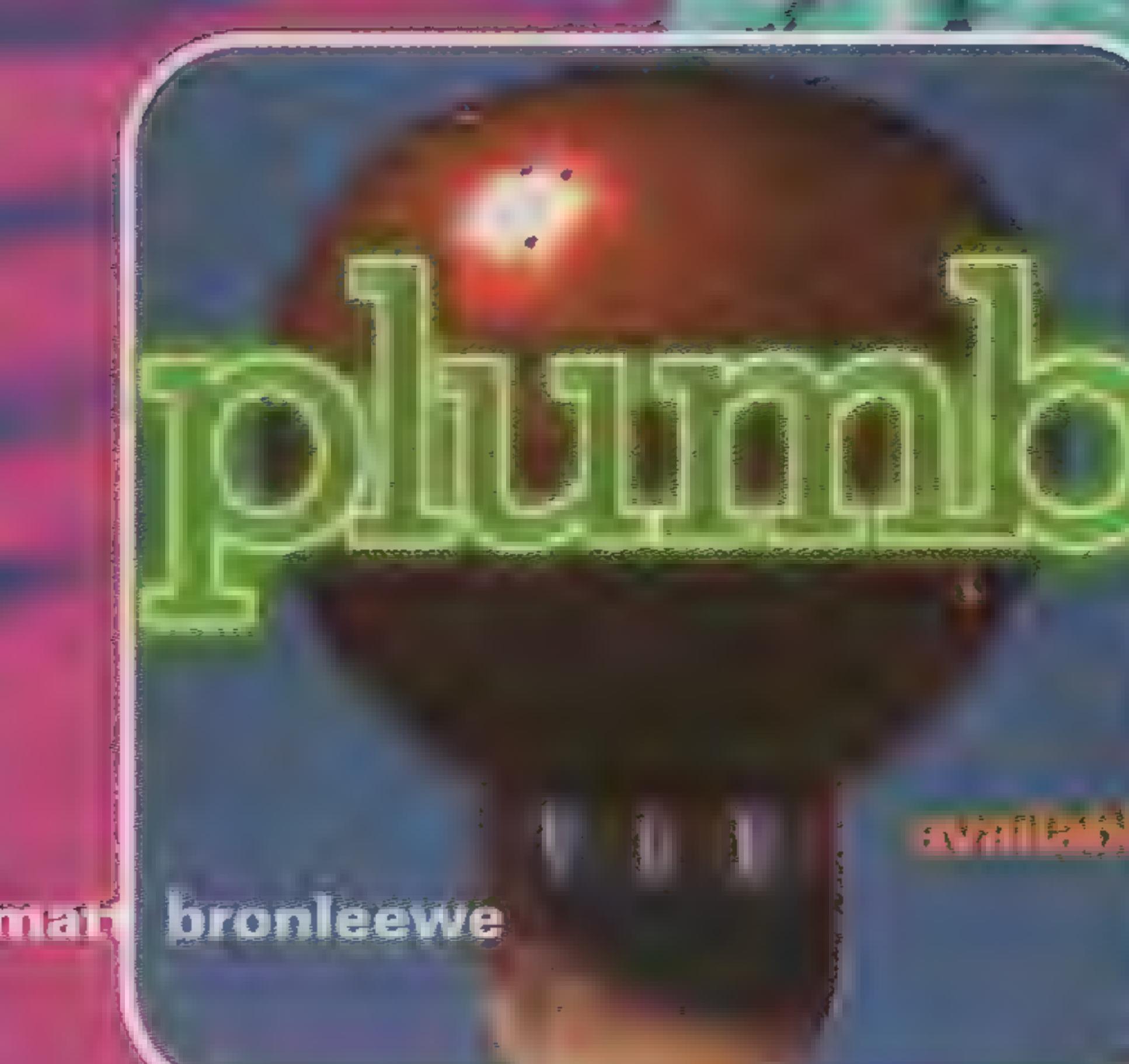
For Danielson Family's *...Tell Another Joke at the ol' Choppin' Block*, Kramer is in the producer's chair; and, with several of his siblings joining him in the studio, Danielson's one-man vision has given way to a slightly slicker production values. This is not a bad thing, since the upscale approach only serves to accentuate Danielson's singular way of expressing his applications of biblical truths. Besides, don't get the idea that, in this instance, "slick" means anything like the cookie-cutter mentality of many Christian producers.

Family members—ranging from age 12 to 24—add banjo, glockenspiel, drums, piano and other keyboards, to create what one might call "modern psychedelic music." Although "Jesus Music" was born at the time of the hippie movement's conquest of contemporary culture, Christian music has never had much use for the mind-expanding characteristics of psychedelic rock, even when it had a like effect on our spirits. But Danielson Family's ...*Choppin' Block* addresses subjects such as death, monogamy, motherly love and devotion to the Most High—all without benefit of hallucinogens. Even if Danielson Family remains an acquired taste, it won't be for lack of originality or talent.

—Jamie Lee Rake



produced by dan haseltine and mark bronleewe



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essential
defining the vibe.



media watch

by chris well

College students are renaming their dorms and everybody comes dressed as their favorite vegetables. High school youth groups are begging for designer boxer shorts. Grandparents, small children, hard-edged Gen-X cybersurfers—they all love VeggieTales. "It's not just a show," animator Phil Vischer agrees. With a chuckle, he adds, "It's a total media experience."

The adventures of Bob the Tomato and Larry the Cucumber have topped the Christian sales charts for months. The show was designed to appeal to small children and their parents. However, segments like "Silly Songs with Larry" ("the part of the show where Larry comes out and sings a silly song") and parodies of Star Trek, Gilligan's Island and Home Improvement have endeared the show to thousands who, technically, aren't supposed to be watching. Like Sesame Street, except it's populated by computer-generated talking vegetables. This is cool stuff.

But it didn't catch on right away. "I was worried for awhile, because it took awhile to get going," Vischer says. "It was out for about a year and people were still going, Vegetable telling Bible stories? I don't think so." Slowly, word of mouth was building, until VeggieTales finally exploded.

"Then it was a relief, because I was thinking, Gee, maybe I'm wrong

... maybe I don't know what people will like. I don't think

you should ever do what you think people will like.

You should always do what you like, and hope

that people like what you like. If you do

market research to try and figure out what

people think is funny, and then try to

write based on that market research,

it's going to be stupid. No matter

what you do.

"Do what you like. If you find out

people don't like what you like,

Folk Alternative Roots Rock
Midwest Rock Old School Punk
Industrial Avant Garde
Alternative Pop Electric Pop
Noise Pop Indie Rock LoFi Metal
Punk Rock Agro Rock Loud Jangly
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do something else with your life," he laughs.

Vischer, who co-created *veggieTales* with Mike Nawrocki, knew since he was 14 he was going to make movies. He started his own animation studio when he was 23—a one-man shop where he and his computer made TV commercials and flying logos. "I was never a traditional animator. Almost no one in the company is doing anything they've ever done before. Every day we make up a new way to do this, because none of us knew how you were supposed to do a cartoon."

The first thing you discover is that each episode takes a long time. The animation is a meticulous process: For example, the 20-second appearance of Bob and Larry on last year's *Dove Awards* took about a day to produce. Vischer rolls his eyes upward and calculates: "Bob and Larry standing on the counter talking . . . one animator can do between 20 and 30 seconds in a day. The big stories, where they're having chase scenes on sleds and wrestling penguins and that sort of thing, will drop to about six

or seven seconds a day."

Something else that slows the machinery is the writing. As the primary scriptwriter for *veggieTales*, Vischer puts a lot of care into each episode: Although he wants to make sure each script contains at least one lesson

for children—don't discount others because they seem different; don't abandon your values because of peer pressure; God is bigger than anything that might frighten you—Vischer also meticulously crafts each episode to be funny. It's important to him. His personal favorites include *The Simpsons*, *Monty Python*, *Tim Burton* and the Coen brothers. "It's often the darker comedies I'm drawn to," he says. "At the same time, I'm a Christian, I have a spiritual life, I have a family, I have kids that I love."

Many say comedy comes out of



pain." . . . Vischer agrees. After his parents divorced when he was 13, he used sarcasm to keep people at a distance. Today, he's a happy husband and father, but he's glad to say he still has his sense of humor. "I've found a lot of people who grew up

in healthy homes and had a healthy upbringing and then have healthy marriages, have almost no sense of humor whatsoever.

"It's sad to think the only way to get a good sense of humor is to go through pain . . . but when you start looking at different comedians, you know, it's just like a litany of dysfunction that produces comedy. Which begs the question: Why aren't more Christian videos funny? The answer, of course, is because most videos are produced by people who are really healthy."

Various Artists

Tattoo Video Hoopla, Volume 1

Tattoo Records

Video Hoopla is equal parts marketing tool, comedy video and fan souvenir. It succeeds—at least partially—on all counts. Its likability is largely a result of its "Wayne's World/we swiped mom and dad's video camera" charm.



The "fish out of water" premise which sets the scene for the package involves Tim, an Australian lad visiting Nashville and sending a

video postcard home to the folks. The joke revolves around the fact that Tim, while hoping to learn more about the Christian music culture, actually proves to know more about the biz than many of the folks he encounters. Not the least of those is "Cabby," a sad sack cab driver played for droll chuckles by former PFR drummer Mark Nash. Tim & Mark's tour of many of the eateries favored by Nashville music insiders would have made a great film, in and of itself.

Tim eventually sits down to talk with Common Children, Derry Daugherty & Steve Hindalong (The Choir), Between Thieves and Christine Glass about their music. Although not a probing correspondent, Tim's natur-

al inquisitiveness elicits some very enlightening responses from all of the artists. That's especially helpful for Between Thieves and Christine Glass, since their albums hadn't even been released at the time the video was produced. Two conceptual clips which have been widely televised—Common Children's "Drought" and The Choir's "Sled Dog"—make their commercial debuts on this collection.

There's also two other tangents happening concurrently. The first involves Buddy Tattoo and some not-so-subtle jabs at the music biz—an industry which is, admittedly, an easy target. You see, Buddy is a ventriloquist's dummy, who, while being manipulated, is also manipulating the



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careers of his artists. For instance, a couple of innocent teenagers, The Blue Joons (innocently played by Sarah Masen and Molly Ashworth), pitch some tunes to Buddy, who patronizes them, and then scares them out of his office. Later, Buddy is seen arguing with producer Tedd T. over the guitar sounds on the Between Thieves album and beaming as 4Him's Marty Magehee overdubs a heavy metal vocal. This guy is a very troubled dummy.

Interspersed throughout the first portion of the video, as well as making up the final half, is terrific live footage of The Choir from the Cornerstone '96 festival. Hoopla collects the bulk of the songs from the band's ragged but satisfying final gig. The audio, while digital quality, also points out the fact that this was not The Choir's finest performance. But the crisp camera work, directed by the late Dave Perry (to whom this portion of the package is dedicated), puts the viewer right onstage with the band throughout the intense gig.

The only downside to Hoopla is that you don't get to learn as much about the new artists as you may have wanted, and you don't really get to experience the Choir show from start to finish. Still, the charm of the individual components, combined with the low list price (\$12.98) makes Hoopla a worthy purchase. 

-Bruce A. Brown

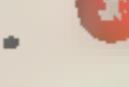
Welcome again to our look at the collision point between music and multimedia. This time, we take a look at one of the net's most interactive music pages—a site that will even recommend artists you may like! As usual, given the web's constant state of flux, please be aware that site content and addresses mentioned below may have changed since press time.

Firefly


It seems like every music message board you encounter on the internet (including 7ball's own boards) contains a proliferation of messages asking questions like, "What are some good ska bands?" or "Can someone suggest other bands similar to "Band X?" Well you may not know it, but a site called firefly is designed to help you with such questions. While it isn't a "Christian" site, many Christian artists are represented in the database. By spending some time teaching the site your likes and dislikes, you'll eventually train it to help you locate new music that you might enjoy.

To join in on the fun you must first become a member. This is completely free and simply requires that you fill out a brief online form. Once you're in, you have access to a variety of chat rooms and bulletin boards (beware: topics can be a bit crass) or you can locate other firefly members with similar listening interests.

But the highlight of this site is its rating and recommendation system for music (the site also does the same for movies). Firefly provides lists of artists for you to rate at your leisure on a scale of 1 (hate it) to 7 (the best). With these ratings you not only compile a list of your top picks for your firefly personal profile, but you give the number-crunching firefly computer reference points for your likes and dislikes. This allows firefly to offer you recommendations of music based on similar ratings from other members. The suggestions aren't always on the money, but artist pages with sound clips, bios, and reviews by other members help you learn more before you buy (which you can also usually do via firefly).

In general, you'll find that the site's predictions become more accurate as you rate more and more artists, but unfortunately, it is also possible to reach a point at which firefly runs out of recommendations. Still, if you're in the market for some new music (and who isn't?), take advantage of one of the web's most ambitious sites and let firefly have a crack at widening your musical horizons. 

Collision Point
by Doug Brumley





GADGETWATCH

Once a year, directly across the street from Disneyland, a convention rolls into town that for musicians, really is "the happiest place on earth."



Inside the huge Anaheim Convention

Center, many of the largest guitar, bass, keyboard and drum companies in the world gather to display their products, in an effort to impress both retail store buyers and the media. Surveys show that *7ball* readers are not only a great group of music fans, but an exceptionally high percentage are also practicing musicians. The following is a report of what's new on the musical instrument front...right from the convention floor.

This year NAMM—which stands for National Association of Music Merchants (music equipment makers)—staged its largest convention to date. We could clearly see that the feeling

this year was "retro is cool." Working our way through booth after booth, one question kept popping up: Why is it this year that everything new looks and sounds like something old? Each popular musical instrument category has had a "Golden Era" in its past. For the electric guitar, it was the '59 Gibson Les Paul or the '63 Fender Strat. For synths/keyboards it was the fat analog sounds of the early '70s—the Oberheims and Moogs with large knobs and funky sliders.

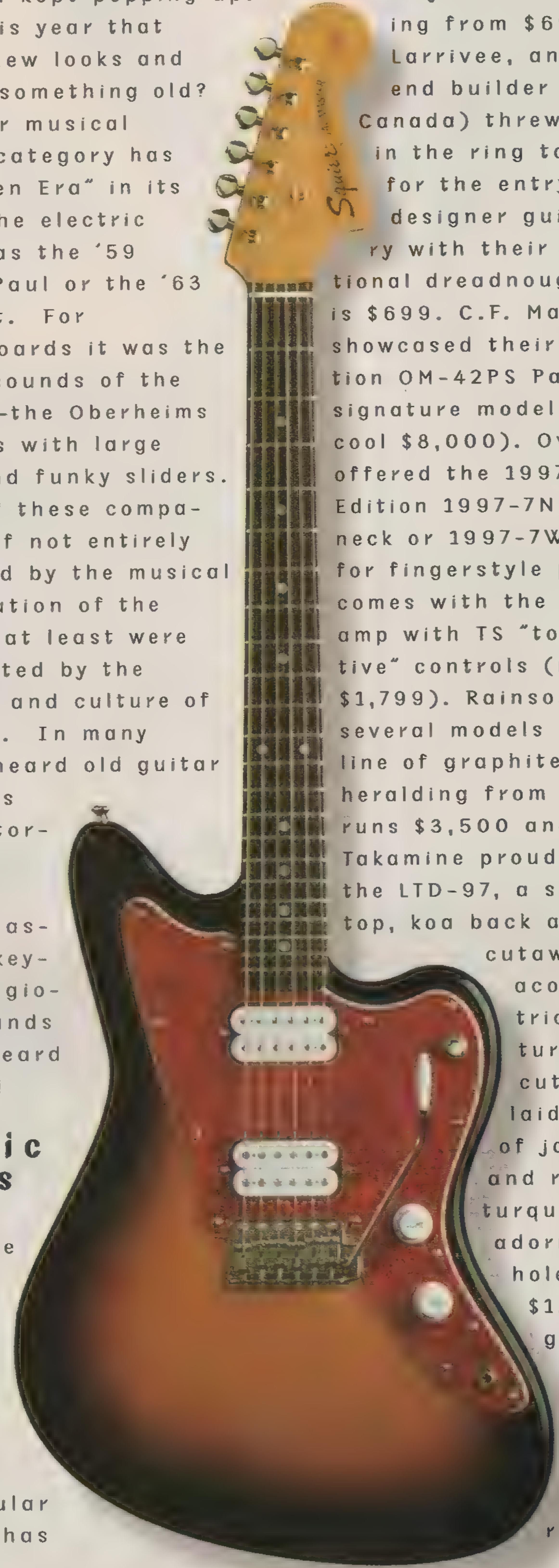
Most of these companies, if not entirely shaped by the musical revolution of the '60s, at least were impacted by the music and culture of that era. In many cases, we heard old guitar pedal sounds (cheesy distortion and vibratos) alongside classic analog keyboard arpeggio-sweeps—sounds we hadn't heard in 20 years!

Acoustic Guitars

Our first stop was the Guild booth. They've reintroduced the flame maple-back and -sides D30, a popular model that has

been off the market for three years now (\$1,399) and are ripping it up in sales of their entry level models (ranging from \$695-\$1,200). Larrivee, another high-end builder (from Canada) threw their hat in the ring to compete for the entry-level designer guitar category with their D-03 traditional dreadnought... retail is \$699. C.F. Martin & Co. showcased their limited edition OM-42PS Paul Simon signature model (retail is a cool \$8,000). Ovation offered the 1997 Collector's Edition 1997-7N standard neck or 1997-7W wide neck for fingerstyle players. It comes with the Stealth preamp with TS "touch-sensitive" controls (retail is \$1,799). Rainsong displayed several models in their fine line of graphite guitars heralding from Maui (retail runs \$3,500 and up).

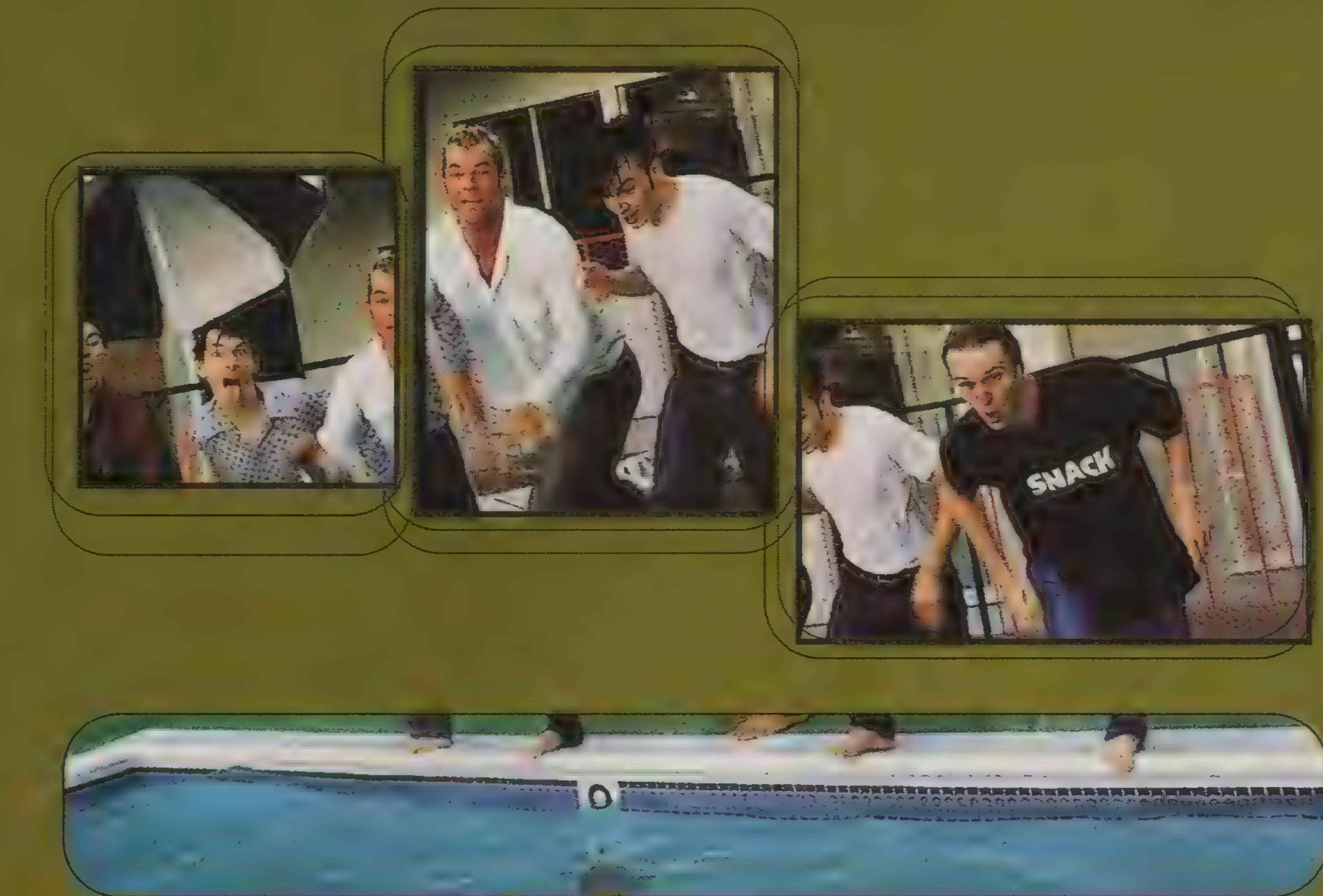
Takamine proudly displayed the LTD-97, a solid spruce top, koa back and sides cutaway acoustic/electric that features a laser cut, hand inlaid gecko made of jacaranda and real turquoise to adorn the sound-hole (retail is \$1,799). Tacoma guitars exhibited for the first time, entering the American-made guitar race with the



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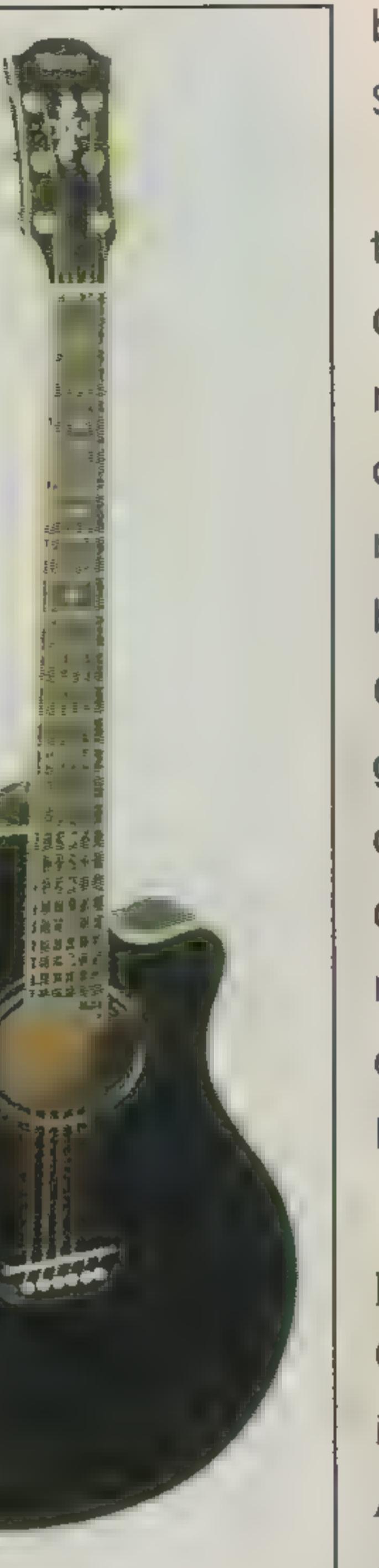
DM10 dreadnought (\$799). Taylor guitars showcased their great line of acoustics—I'm sure you've noticed Jars of Clay sporting a few lately. Their entry level 400 Series guitars (\$998 and up) are doing well and they offer a full assortment of series, all the way up to the Presentation Series. These are simply drop-dead-gorgeous guitars, featuring Brazilian rosewood and Engelmann spruce tops, with four models in the \$9,000 price range. YAMAHA's popular APX line took another step forward with the introduction of the APX10A solid spruce top acoustic/electric with sycamore back and sides and a mahogany neck. The guitar sports a 2-way bridge and body pick-up system along with active electronics, 3 band E.Q. and pick-up mix. The APX10A is available in a left-handed model (APX10LA) and a nylon string cedar top model (APX10NA).



Blues Hawk

Electric Guitars
 We were invited to the "Fender Tribute to Jimi Hendrix" press release party. The ballroom was packed, with live footage of Jimi playing at the Monterey Pop and at Woodstock festivals. Jimi's father and sister shared some touching stories with the audience before FENDER unveiled the limited edition Jimi Hendrix Stratocaster models. One is a collector's piece, designed after the Monterey Pop Festival guitar (only 163 guitars will be made) and the other is the famous Olympic White strat from Woodstock with a maple neck and large late '60s-style headstock (the Woodstock model will be more available to the masses). Fender also introduced new Squier guitars—the Vista Series—as well as showcasing the Jag Master and Super Sonic models.

GIBSON has quite an illustrious heritage to lean on, as well. Their custom shop display was like strolling through an art museum. They introduced the Blues Hawk, another in the successful Night Hawk series. The guitar comes with matching f-shaped sound holes and all new Blues 90 pick-ups.



Fernandez showcased the H-80, a retro-looking electric designed for a warm, fat sound. It has a mahogany body and neck, rosewood fingerboard and two mini-humbuckers (retail is \$1,199).

Parker displayed their new Fly Classics, one with a new metallic teal color and ultra-responsive vibrato bridge (\$2,715). Christian session guitarists Dann Huff and Jerry McPherson are playing Parkers now, as well as early endorser Phil Keaggy.

ZION, another popular make among Christian players, introduced the Action Series guitar, a Strat-styled basswood body maple neck with Seymour Duncan pick-ups and lots of quality (retail \$1,150).

We want to help 7ball readers keep up with what's hot in music gear and other gadgets. Watch for more reports in future issues. Remember ... a well-educated and equipped musician is a better musician.

If you have any questions about something mentioned in this article, e-mail us at [7ball@7ball.com] or give us a call at the 7ball offices at (615) 872-8080 and we'll point you in the right direction. 7

Bruce Adolph is editor of Christian Musician's INSTITUTE, a bimonthly publication committed to Christian musicians. For more information, write him at C.M.I. at 4441 South Meridian Suite #275 Puyallup, WA 98373.

LIVE CONCERT VIDEO IN STORES TUESDAY, JUNE 17





photograph by elena lopez

TONY ALVAREZ

BY CHRIS WELL

Tony Alvarez rides his bike. And he's good. As a world-class freestyle bicycle stunt rider, he wants to use his ability to impress crowds to share his faith in Jesus Christ. Because, to him, it's just a platform for his ministry.

He and his wife Amber, who have been married nine months, run Celestial Style from their home in Orlando, where he's almost like a rock star. However, instead of his platform being extreme noise, his platform is extreme sports. "Kids like to be entertained," he says. "Everything is extreme, all-the-way, go-past-your-limits, no fear. In the secular arena, bicycle shows are really big right now."

Tony explains that Celestial Style was originally started doing public school shows, using the bicycle stunt show as a means to talk to kids about drug awareness and bicycle safety. "With us being Christians and having ministry in our hearts, it led to that really quickly. We're pretty much a full-time ministry now, marketing bicycle stunt shows that include the Gospel message."

Tony takes his stunt shows to the park, to the street corner—he's even performed at Disneyworld, Sea World and most recently as



photograph by lee sellers - 407.291.3924 - email: corner@nebula.ispace.com

part of the first stop of The GAS Tour in Kissimmee, Fla. He performs for millions of people a year. Tony splits his time between performing for spectators and sharing his faith with other extreme sports enthusiasts. "When I hang out at skate parks and the like, that's where a lot of the people haven't really touched base with the Gospel," he says. "I have Christian symbols on my bike. It's not that I believe they will do your ministering for you, but it opens a door when people ask you about them.

"On the other hand, on the stage, professing Christ is my number one thing. I can have fun, doing stunts and entertaining everybody, but they need to understand that the sole purpose behind everything is Jesus Christ and what He can do in our lives. I really don't want to be known as a bicycle stunt rider," he says. "I want to be known as a person who's devoted to Jesus Christ and rides a bike."

The appeal of extreme sports is often the individuality that comes with it—Tony finds his ministry especially appeals to those who feel alienated, and perhaps don't find comfort or confidence in their home life. He says these people often turn to their friends, and if they choose the wrong kind of friends—as he did when he was young—it leads them down the wrong path. "By age 13 I was confronted with drugs, and got into a pretty hardcore life of drugs from the ages of 15 all the way to 20. You'll find in the extreme sports scene that everything is really derived from rebellion, everyone just wanting to be loners. Therefore, you see a lot of crazy stuff. A lot of people are involved in the New Age movement. Satanism is really big in the skate scene."

In the midst of all that, he developed his world-class skills. At 21, his life turned around, when his now-wife Amber led him to the Lord. "I just trusted God with my life and He's done a lot with it. He's brought it to a new level."

The ministry he has built is simply one of gratitude. "When somebody does something that big for you, you want to do something for them," Tony says. The first thing that came to mind was his riding. "I want to take it a step further and tell people I'm a bicycle stunt rider, but I also have something in my life that's a lot more important to me than riding a bike."

When he goes to big festivals—like, say, on a California boardwalk, and there's a

bunch of bands and the sun and the beach—he's just out there riding his bike. "You end up getting this huge, huge crowd. It used to be possible to pass the hat and make like 50 or 100 dollars in 15 minutes. Once I noticed I could get a lot of people's attention, I realized I could reach a lot of people for Jesus Christ."

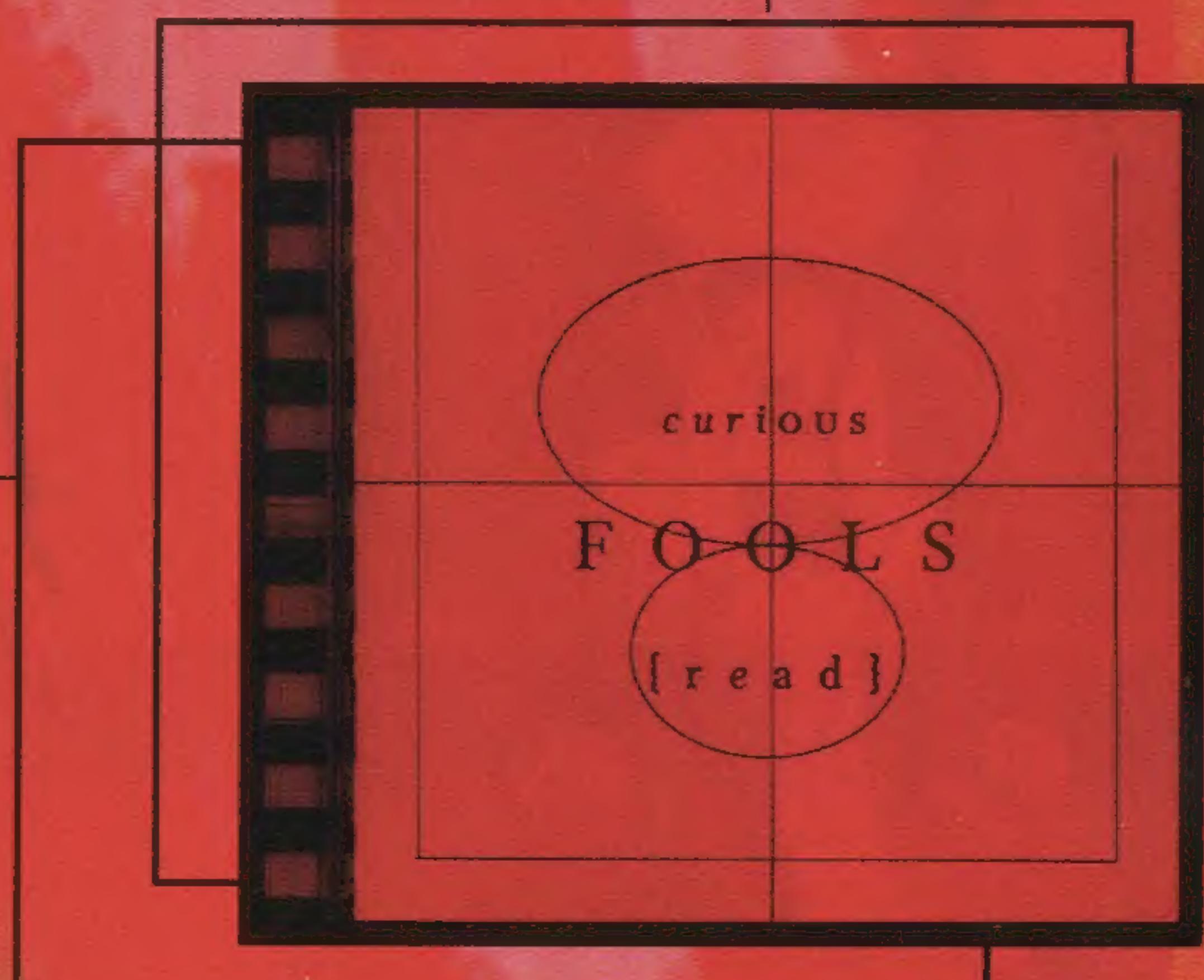
If you want to talk to Tony about

bringing his ministry your way—or if you want to plug into his ministry—you can reach Tony and Amber at (407) 239-4889. "The main vision for Celestial Style is to be an outlet," Tony says. "If there's anybody else out there into extreme sports who wants to use their talents to express Jesus Christ, I want Celestial Style to be that outlet." ●

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PURE rock report

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Krank/Tooth & Nail
5. BREATHE BABYLON
P.O.D./Rescue
6. SLIP
Six Feet Deep/R.E.X.
7. MEPHIBOSETH
Mortification/Rowe
8. NOAH WAS A KNOWER
Mortification/Rowe
9. REACT
Jesus Freaks/Narrowpath
10. AWESOME GOD
Unshamed/Tooth & Nail

Rhythmic

1. The Real Thing
World Wide Message Tribe
2. KEEP ON PRAISIN'
Warner Alliance
3. I FOUND SOMETHING REAL
A.J. Mora/N-Soul
4. KEEP IT FUNKY
Frost/Rescue
5. ONE TIME MAN
Jesus Music/441 Music
6. PLANET LOVE
dba/Warner Alliance
7. CELIA
Gotee Brothers/Gotee
8. DON'T WANT IT
Touch of Faith/Big Doggie
9. BOTTLE ROCKET (REMIX)
Guardian/Myrrh
10. THE BLOOD CRIES
Dynamic Twins/Metro One

Rock

1. BOTTLE ROCKET
Guardian/Myrrh
2. SMASH HIT
All Star United/Reunion
3. BREATHE
Newsboys/StarSong
4. WHEN I'M BROKEN
Vigilantes of Love/
Warner Resound
5. FREE RIDE
Audio Adrenaline/ForeFront
6. I CAN
Skillet/ForeFront
7. BIG FAT NOTHING
Believable Picnic/Absolute
8. IF YOU WANT TO
LEAD ME TO JESUS
Grover Levy/Myrrh
9. FEEL THE RAIN
My Friend Stephanie/
Innocent Media
10. DOGS OF PEACE
Dogs of Peace/Sparrow
11. A FLOWERY SONG
Five Iron Frenzy/5 Min Walk
12. ELEVEN
Bleach/ForeFront
13. AMAZING LOVE
Whitecross/R.E.X.
14. THE WORM
Bride/Organic
15. TRIED TO TELL HER
PFR/Sparrow

Modern Rock

1. EMBR
Fold Zandura/Sub-Lime
2. A FLOWERY SONG
Five Iron Frenzy/5 Min Walk
3. FROM THE LION WITHIN
Luxury/Tooth & Nail
4. NERVOUS
Dryve/SaraBellum
5. DOMESTICITY
Common Children/Tattoo
6. I CAN
Skillet/ForeFront
7. ELEVEN
Bleach/ForeFront
8. FEEL THE RAIN
My Friend Stephanie/
Innocent Media
9. WHEN I'M BROKEN
Vigilantes of Love/
Warner Resound
10. WAKE UP CHRISTINE
The Julies/Flying Tart
11. SMASH HIT
All Star United/Reunion
12. ECUMENICAL
Black Eyed Sceva/5 Min Walk
13. GET OUTTA HERE
Blockball/Metro One
14. BLINDER
Honey/Sub-Lime
15. AFFECTION
Pushstart Wagon/B.A.I.

HEY YOU! FLIP THROUGH THE MAG AND WATCH THE BOX BELOW.

Follow the leader.

7



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By Scott Henson

7ball

"Don't let anyone make fun of you, just because you are young. Set an example for other followers by what you say and do, as well as by your love, faith and purity."

I Timothy 4:12 (CEV)

HEY YOU! FLIP THROUGH THE MAG AND WATCH THE BOX BELOW.

7ball

In my church youth group, Amy Grant was controversial, Petra was forbidden, and Stryper was an outrage. I guess that dates me, and also establishes that I didn't exactly enter the magazine business an expert on Christian rock music.

Music and I have come a long way

since the '80s. I'm still far from an expert, yet occasionally I'll surprise the 7ball gang when I identify a new punk or ska band even before Frank, Chris, or Bruce can. But for the real work of modern rock journalism, there is little doubt these guys and the entire staff at VoxCorp have started something unique with 7ball. Something even a newcomer like me can get passionate about.

I admit that not everything I discover about modern rock and alternative music is inspiring or beyond reproach. But, then again, when I worked as a staff minister, not everything I witnessed in the church was, either. Sometimes the wheat and weeds just grow together, and the truth can't always be judged by appearances. I can honestly say, though, that some of the most genuine, effective ministry that I have witnessed is through the voices and actions of Christian rockers.

Living and working most of my career in different places around the world, I lost touch with my own culture and your generation. To a great extent, I lost compassion.

When you witness starvation, disease, and oppression first hand, it's hard to be sympathetic to the problems of a nation more wealthy, educated, and technologically advanced than any before.

While I was away, Generation X committed suicide and turned to crime in record numbers. Millions around the world starved with their tables empty; it appeared to me that America chose to starve with its table full.

I sometimes wonder why God called me to serve those that already have so much. Maybe that

is the reason: You have so much. With the wealth, technology, and energy possessed by your generation, you may very well be the ones who take the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

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THE TRUTH CAN'T ALWAYS BE JUDGED

BY APPEARANCES.

be entertaining, relevant and real. And it must present Truth. More than anything, we just want to see one more scraggly band of disciples turn the world upside down—before it all winds down.

While they may be packaged differently than some of us expected, the missionaries to today's youth are arriving. And, believe me, they are not reluctant to rock.

When our fearless leader, the prez & CEO of VoxCorp, Inc., isn't on his soapbox, Scott also changes diapers, teaches marketing and stage dives at The GAS Tour. OK, we made one of those up.

ever get tired
of frat rock
(hootie)

whiney complaint rock

(alanis)

or perhaps even
trendy pop rock

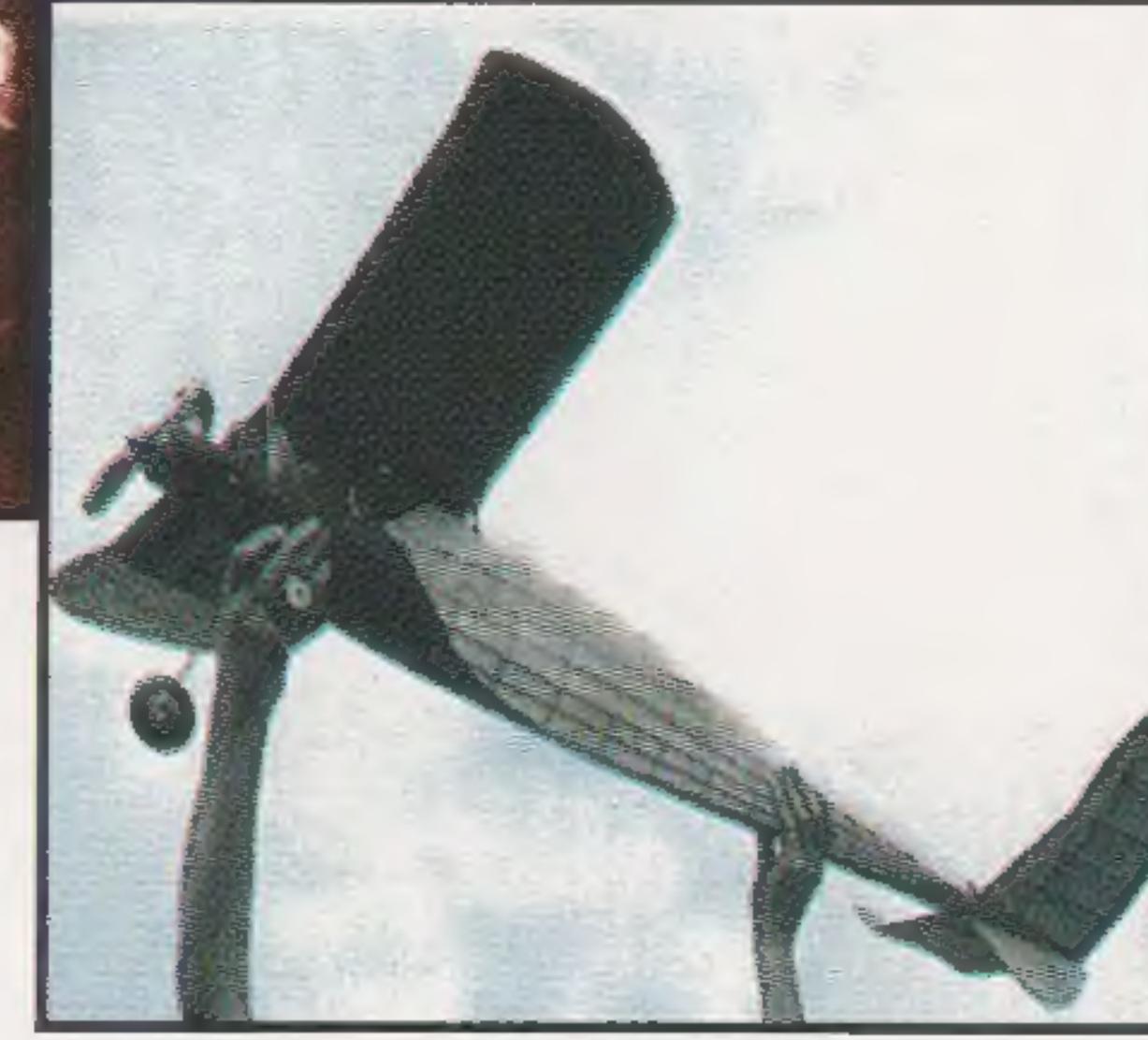
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overpayed

most over-rated


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